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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

CHAMBRUN AND THE ELECTRONIC EAR	Hugh Pentecost	6
RETURN OF THE HERO	Michael Gilbert	21
THE CERULIANA CAPER	Jacob Hay	30
WASPS' NEST	Agatha Christie	43
FAREWELL BANQUET	John Pierce	52
VENGEANCE	Anton Chekhov	70
THE MISCHIEF DONE	Edmund Crispin	75
THE APPEARANCE OF FACT	Robert C. Schweik	90
FOR CAKE WITH CLOTTED CREAM	Phyllis Ann Karr	102
WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH	Isaac Asimov	113
CLEVER AND QUICK	Christianna Brand	129
INTERPOL: CASE OF THE MUSICAL BULLET	Edward D. Hoch	141
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	111

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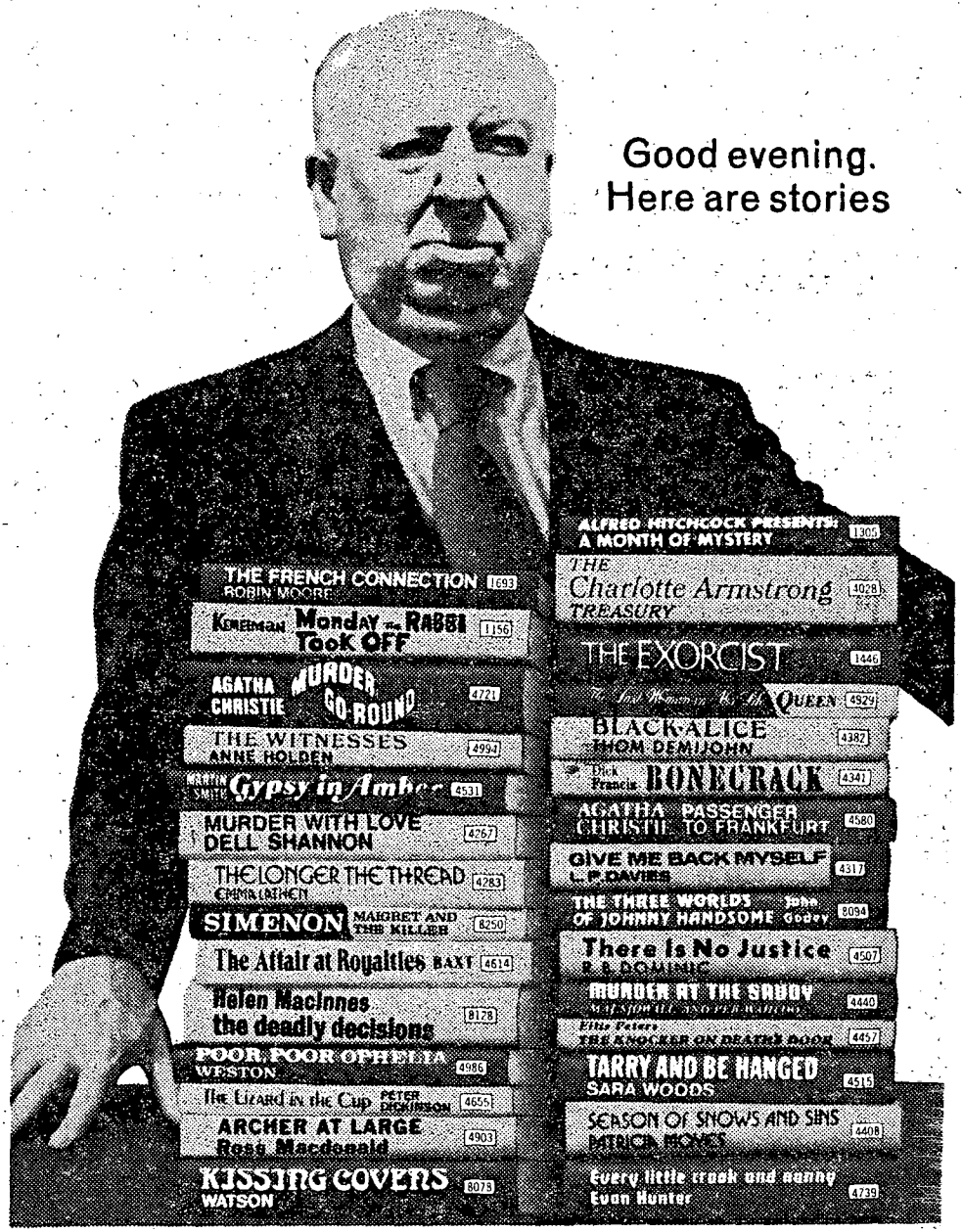

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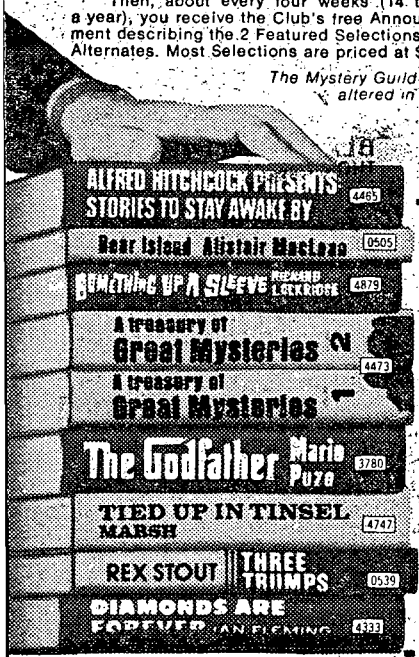
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a NEW Pierre Chambrun story by

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Pierre Chambrun is the resident-manager of the Beaumont, the top luxury hotel in America. As the "boss" of a city within a city, Chambrun has been involved in all kinds of mysteries—from theft to impersonation to kidnaping to murder. Usually the solution to the mystery is the unmasking of the criminal—the who. And usually we know the motives of the suspects—the why. In this newest Chambrun adventure there is more emphasis on the modus operandi—the how of the crime. But you'll find no diminution of interest and suspense—far from it!

CHAMBRUN AND THE ELECTRONIC EAR

by HUGH PENTECOST

Mrs. Veach, the motherly-looking chief operator on the switchboard at the Beaumont Hotel, was the first one to detect something irregular about the telephone in Room 912. The noise she heard was a faint continuous buzzing the moment the line was open. Mrs. Veach promptly called Jerry Dodd, the Beaumont's security officer.

Dodd listened, gave Mrs. Veach an approving pat on her wide shoulders, and headed for the second floor.

The second floor is where the heart of the Beaumont beats—in the private office of Pierre Chambrun, the legendary resident-manager of America's top luxury hotel. Chambrun is a short square man with bright black eyes buried in deep pouches—eyes that can twinkle with humor and compassion or turn frighteningly cold and hard when the efficiency of the

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Beaumont is threatened.

The Beaumont is the private world over which Chambrun presides—a small city within one building with its own shops, restaurants, night clubs, cooperatively owned apartments, hospital, safety-deposit vaults, beauty parlors, ballrooms, bars, even its own police force. Chambrun is the "boss," the king with the uncanny ability to know exactly what is going on in his domain everywhere and at all times.

Some people think Chambrun has a kind of built-in radar system of his own, but those of us who work for him know his secret: it is simply that nothing even remotely out of the ordinary is ever kept from him by any of his staff. Jerry Dodd, the wiry little security officer, was perfectly competent to handle the suggestion from Mrs. Veach that the telephone in Room 912 might be bugged, but it wouldn't have occurred to Jerry not to go to Chambrun first.

I happened to be with Chambrun when Jerry reported. I am Mark Haskell, the public-relations man for the hotel and as close to Chambrun as anyone on his staff. My office is just down the corridor from his.

Chambrun listened to what Jerry had to say, then pressed a buzzer on his desk. Miss Ruysdale, his fabulous secretary, appeared in the door to the outer office.

"Card on Room 912, please," Chambrun said. He took a sip of the Turkish coffee from the cup at his elbow and lit one of his flat Egyptian cigarettes. His eyes narrowed against the smoke.

"You know anything about the occupant in 912?" Chambrun asked Jerry.

"Name—Warren Wilson," Jerry said. "Checked in yesterday. I haven't had a chance to look at his card."

Guests of the Beaumont Hotel might have been a little disturbed to know how complete the record was on them. On their cards were symbols which indicated their credit standing, their marital status, whether or not they were cheating on a spouse, how they handled their liquor. On the card there could be a notation that Chambrun had something special about them in his private file that he didn't want to become general knowledge.

Warren Wilson's card showed that he had not been a guest of the hotel before. We had nothing yet on his habits or his private life. But there was one interesting thing about him. His room had been reserved for him and his credit vouched for by a

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deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington.

"Cloak and dagger," Chambrun muttered. His eyes glittered. "The whole damned country is playing spy games these days, a million phones bugged. Half the world takes it as some sort of amusing parlor game. Who's listening to whom? Not, by God, in this hotel!" He took a deep drag on his cigarette, then ground it out in the ashtray on his desk. "Call Mr. Wilson, Mark, and tell him we'd like to come up to see him."

Mr. Wilson didn't answer his phone. Chambrun decided we would make an examination of Wilson's room whether he was there or not.

There was very little of interest in the room. Wilson had one extra suit, half a dozen shirts, some fresh underwear and handkerchiefs, two rather plain neckties, shaving things in the bathroom. There were no letters, papers, or brief cases. Only a slightly aged canvas airplane bag. It was rather less than you'd expect to find in a $70 per day room.

I checked all this out while Jerry searched the room for a bugging device. He found what he was looking for in the telephone instrument itself. He had unscrewed the mouthpiece and sat looking at it, scowling.

"This is it," he said to Chambrun. "Sophisticated little doojigger. Sends the sound to a listener somewhere or to a tape recorder somewhere. Like a tiny radio."

"Be careful how you handle it," Chambrun said. "It's so small it couldn't have been installed by a man wearing gloves. There might be a fingerprint on it."

At that moment there was the sound of a key in the door and a man came in. Warren Wilson was, I guessed, in his early thirties. He had sandy hair, cut short, and what was normally a pleasant boyish face. He was angry now.

"Who the hell are you and what are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I'm Pierre Chambrun, the hotel manager," Chambrun said. "This is Mr. Dodd, our security officer, and Mr. Haskell, our public-relations man."

"You're not entitled to be in my room!" Wilson said. He was staring at the phone which Jerry still held, taken apart, in his hands.

"We had reason to think your phone was bugged, Mr. Wilson," Chambrun said. "I didn't choose to wait for you to get back. Show him, Jerry."

Jerry held out the instrument. "Tiny radio device," he said. "Anything you said on the

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phone went out somewhere. I haven't had a chance to check it, but it may have reported anything that went on in here whether the phone was in use or not."

"That's crazy!" Wilson said. "Who had the room before me? It could have been for them—no chance to remove it."

"Your room was reserved for you by the C.I.A., Mr. Wilson. I assume you work for them," Chambrun said.

Wilson drew a deep breath and fumbled for a cigarette. "I guess there's no point in trying to pretend," he said. "Yes, I work for the C.I.A."

"You care to tell us why you're here at the Beaumont?"

"I can give you a surface explanation," Wilson said. "I'm what you might call a courier. I am carrying documents to be delivered to someone else registered here at the hotel."

"Who?"

Wilson studied the end of his cigarette. "I don't think I can tell you that, Mr. Chambrun. I will say that my contact is supposed to register here at the hotel. He hasn't done so yet."

"So you are waiting for him to show up?"

"Yes."

Chambrun glanced at the card in his hand. "You checked in yesterday noon."

"Yes."

"Did you ask for the man you're supposed to meet?"

"Yes."

"Whom did you ask?"

"The man at the desk who registered me."

"Atterbury," Jerry Dodd said. He knew exactly who was on duty every hour of the day.

"Whom did you ask for?" Chambrun asked.

"Sorry. I can't tell you that."

Chambrun turned to me. "Find out, Mark," he said. "Call Atterbury on the housekeeper's phone. We can't use this one." He looked at Wilson. "Atterbury will remember," he said.

Wilson shrugged. "I don't suppose the name matters," he said. "It isn't his real name. I asked for Curt Helwig. The man at the desk told me he had a reservation but that he hadn't checked in."

"And he still hasn't checked in?"

"According to the front desk."

"Have you any idea who might have wanted to overhear your conversations, Mr. Wilson?"

Wilson shook his head slowly. "No idea," he said.

"If you'd had any sensitive telephone calls to make would you have made them on this phone that goes through a

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switchboard?" Chambrun asked.

"Of course not."

Chambrun was, I saw, controlling his anger. "I don't like this kind of mumbo jumbo going on in my hotel," he said. "The whole damned country seems to be in the hands of idiot children playing spy games. Privacy seems to be a dead privilege. Well, by God, it isn't going to happen in the Beaumont! If somebody will bug your phone, Wilson, they may also try to steal the documents you're carrying. I suggest you put them in the hotel vault."

Wilson grinned. "I put them there right after I registered yesterday," he said. "I intend to leave them there till Helwig shows up."

"Good. Meanwhile we'll remove this device from your phone. When they realize they're not hearing what's going on here that may scare them off. Handle it carefully, Jerry. Remember, we may find a helpful print on it."

We left Jerry Dodd with Wilson and went down to the lobby where Atterbury was on duty again. Atterbury wasn't some kind of memory genius, but he did have total recall about Warren Wilson.

"He asked me for a Curt Helwig," Atterbury told Chambrun. "Helwig wasn't registered. Wilson seemed distressed and asked me to check on whether Helwig had a reservation."

"And did he?" Chambrun asked.

Atterbury nodded. "He did—and not quite usual, Mr. Chambrun. The reservation was made by a Washington source we honor without question. Same people who reserved Wilson's room. The thing that was unusual about Helwig's reservation was that they weren't quite sure when he would arrive—yesterday, today, tomorrow, even the day after that. We were to make sure, however, that there was a room for him when he did appear."

"Damn!" Chambrun said.

I knew what irritated him. The Beaumont is not far from the United Nations Building and many foreign diplomats and attachés make the hotel their home-away-from-home. Quite often we are asked by the State Department or the C.I.A. or top White House personnel to provide special accommodations. It isn't always convenient because the Beaumont rarely has any long-range vacancies.

So, more often than not, to accommodate the government, we'd have to turn away a regular guest. We had what we called "house seats," three or four rooms which we kept

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open, day to day, for emergencies; but these were almost always quickly filled. To hold a room for an indefinite arrival tended to upset our smooth routine.

"Let me know when this Helwig checks in," Chambrun said. "Wilson will pass over his documents—which he tells me are in the vault."

"I put them there—a brief case—myself," Atterbury said.

"Then let's get rid of these two cloak-and-dagger Johns as fast as we can," Chambrun said.

Mr. Wilson and his bugged phone went out of my mind during the rest of that day. I knew Jerry Dodd had removed the electronic gadget from the telephone in 912 and that he was trying to check out its source—that is, the manufacturer. It wasn't, Jerry assured us, a homemade device. There was a fashion show that afternoon that I had to cover and in the evening there was to be a coming-out party in the Grand Ballroom for some debutante chick. These are routines in which a PR man has to involve himself.

It was nearly three in the morning before I finally got to bed in my apartment on the second floor of the hotel. I was bushed, and I went to sleep the moment my head hit the pillow. Actually I hadn't been asleep more than twenty minutes when my phone rang.

I dredged myself up out of some dark void and managed to answer it. It was Mike Maggio, the night bell captain.

"Trouble," Mike said. "You're wanted in the lobby office on the double, Mark."

I mumbled something.

"Robbery," Mike said. "Somebody held up Karl Nevers, the night manager, forced him to open the vault, and took off with God-knows-what."

There had been robberies at the Pierre, the Plaza, the Waldorf-Astoria in the past. We had been waiting for our turn, although we thought our security setup was foolproof.

Behind the front desk in the lobby is a private office for use by the day and night managers. And behind that office is the vault. Only the manager on duty can open it. There's no time lock because guests come in at all times of the day or night with possessions they want to keep safe. Those possessions are mostly jewelry. There have been so many gem robberies around town in plush hotels that we urge guests to keep their gewgaws in the vault. We make it easy for them by having someone who can give them access round the clock.

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Every room and suite in the hotel has a sign in it urging this precaution.

It seemed that at a few minutes after three, the party in the ballroom being over, a Mrs. Horace Paradine, one of the guests, came to the desk and asked Karl Nevers to place her jewels in the vault. They started through the back office to the vault when someone came up behind them and stuck a gun against Mrs. Paradine's head. Nevers and Mrs. Paradine both described him as medium tall, medium thin; he was wearing a raincoat and had a tan-colored stocking mask over his head and face. Nevers would turn off the alarm system and open the vault or Mrs. Paradine would have her brains blown out onto the office rug.

Nevers is a cool character. He wasn't going to risk Mrs. Paradine's brains, if any, and he wasn't going to risk his own hide. He also knew exactly what would happen when he turned off the alarm system. There were two ways to turn it off which, Nevers felt certain, the gunman couldn't know. One way was the ordinary turnoff used when a guest came to get something or deposit something. The second way turned off the alarm but set off another. The instant that second way was used a silent-alarm system went into operation. The security office was warned, Chambrun's office and his penthouse apartment were warned, every maintenance office showed a blinking red light, and every doorman was alerted.

At the vault there was no sign of anything except the absence of alarm. Within two minutes of that second turnoff there was almost no way a thief could get out of the hotel undetected. The system was Jerry Dodd's pride and joy and Karl Nevers' comfort in a tense moment.

He used the second turnoff and opened the vault. Stocking Mask forced him and Mrs. Paradine into the vault, the woman sobbing hysterically.

It was a strange business. Mrs. Paradine, by her account, was wearing $100,000 worth of diamonds and other precious stones. The robber had only to snatch them off her, but he didn't.

Instead, the thief opened a couple of small lockboxes and took a handful of jewels without really looking at them.

"He didn't seem to have anything special in mind," Nevers told us. "He didn't examine what he took. Then he went to the box for Room 912, took out a small zippered brief case, told us to go to the end of

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the vault, went out, and shut us in."

Three minutes later Jerry Dodd opened the vault and let them out. He hadn't met anyone on his way in.

Dr. Partridge, the house physician, was called to deal with the weeping Mrs. Paradine who had lost nothing. Jerry went to cover all his check-points. When I arrived, Chambrun, that hanging-judge look on his face, was in the vault room, waiting with Nevers for Jerry's report.

"It seems quite clear," Chambrun said, "that he wanted it to look like a haphazard robbery which is why he took a few pieces of jewelry. What he really wanted was Warren Wilson's brief case. We'd better tell Wilson what's happened."

I called Wilson on the phone. He sounded sleepy. I told him what had happened and he was suddenly wide-awake.

"Be with you as soon as I can throw on some clothes," he said.

Chambrun fidgeted with one of his flat Egyptian cigarettes, walking around the vault room and actually into the vault itself which was still open. His forehead was drawn together in a concentrated scowl.

"Karl, describe to me again just how he behaved here in the vault," he said, turning to Nevers.

"He forced Mrs. Paradine and me in ahead of him," Nevers said. "He was still holding his gun to her head. Once we were inside the vault he shoved her away and ordered us to the rear of the vault. He was still covering us with the gun, though."

"How did he get the lockboxes open?" Chambrun asked.

"Master key," Nevers said. "He told me to throw him the master key. I did. I wasn't resisting, you understand, Mr. Chambrun. I figured there'd be help any minute."

"You did just the right thing," Chambrun said. "Go on."

"He opened two boxes that were closest to him. He reached in them with his free hand and dug out some pieces of jewelry from each box. He didn't even look at what he had, just stuffed the things in his raincoat pocket. Then he walked directly to the box for 912 and opened it."

"He seemed to know exactly what he was doing?"

"Yes, sir. He opened the box, took out the small brief case, tucked it under his arm, then backed out of the vault and shut us in."

Chambrun took a deep drag

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on his cigarette. "There's a raincoat hanging on the hatrack in the outer office. I noticed it when I came in. Is that yours, Karl?"

"No, sir. It was a beautiful night when I came on duty. I didn't wear any kind of coat. I wouldn't leave a coat in the outer office anyway. There's a coat closet for employees, as you know."

"Get that raincoat, Mark," Chambrun said.

The so-called "outer office" is not a space occupied by anyone in particular. It is a place where a guest can talk to the manager on duty, or to the credit manager, or to anyone else he wants to talk to in private. There is a table in the center of the room, several comfortable Windsor armchairs, a telephone on the table, and an old-fashioned hatrack in the corner near the door.

Chambrun rarely misses anything and he hadn't missed the raincoat hanging on the rack. There shouldn't have been a coat there without someone to go with it. It's the kind of detail that is endlessly registering in his mind as he moves around the hotel—something out of place, no matter how inconsequential.

There was nothing special about the raincoat. I carried it back to the vault room and handed it to Chambrun. He felt in one of the pockets and I saw a bright hard look in his eyes. He brought his hand out and in it was a tan stocking mask. He reached in the other pocket and produced a handful of jewelry which he put on the table.

"The brief case was all he wanted," Chambrun said. "Smart operator. He left you and Mrs. Paradine in the vault, took off his mask and coat, left them on the hatrack, and walked out of here with the brief case under his arm, all casual and innocent-looking."

"Not so casual and innocent-looking," Jerry Dodd said from the doorway. We turned to look at him and his face was pale and tense with anger. "Butch Schooley, whose job it was to cover the northwest fire stairs when that Number Two alarm went off, is dead. Neck broken. Looks like a karate expert did him in."

Schooley was one of the night-security staff. He had evidently responded to the Number Two alarm and taken up his position in the northwest fire stairs. There are four inside fire stairs at the Beaumont, one at each corner of the building. They lead from the penthouse level down to the subbasement where the elevator machinery, the heating and air-conditioning

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units, and the chief engineer's shops were located. From that lower level there were exits to the street.

Schooley's body had been found at the third-floor level by Jerry. Someone had killed him on the way up or down. There was no escape possible from the hotel from the upper levels, so I guessed the murderer had been on the way down to his only way out. I said so.

"No, he didn't get out through the basement," Jerry said. "All the exits were covered down there as soon as the alarm went into effect. The killer is still somewhere in the hotel."

At that moment Warren Wilson joined us. He seemed to have hurried into his clothes, not bothering with a necktie. He looked frightened, I thought.

"Did they really get my brief case?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so," Chambrun said. "But Dodd thinks he's still somewhere in the hotel."

"I—I'd better get in touch with my chief in Washington," Wilson said. "If those documents are lost—even long enough to be photographed—I'm a dead duck, along with quite a few other people."

"There's a phone in the outer office," Chambrun said.

"Thanks," Wilson said and went to it.

There was nothing secret about the phone call. Wilson asked the night supervisor on the switchboard to charge it to his room. He gave her a number and I could see that Chambrun made a mental note of it. Presently there was a connection.

"Mr. Tabor?" Wilson asked. "I'm sorry to call you at this time, sir—there's been a robbery at the hotel and the stuff I was carrying is gone—yes, I know that, sir—no, Helwig hasn't checked in yet—I don't know who knew, except the clerk who put it in the vault for me—yes, the manager is here." Wilson turned to Chambrun. "It's my boss, Mr. Clarence Tabor of the C.I.A.," he said. "Would you please talk to him, Mr. Chambrun?"

Chambrun took the phone. I couldn't hear the other half of the conversation, but Tabor seemed to know Chambrun and Chambrun appeared to know him. "Wilson hasn't told you the whole story," Chambrun said. "Earlier today we discovered that the phone in his room had been bugged. What happened tonight was an armed holdup by a masked man who seemed to know exactly what he was looking for in the vault—no, but we don't think

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he can have gotten out of the hotel, and he won't get out carrying that brief case. He can't hide it on himself—no, but we are about to bring in the police because one of my people has been killed—I don't give a damn about your top-level secrecy, Tabor! One of my staff has been murdered and I don't intend to hold back for God himself!" He put the phone down hard.

Wilson was mopping sweat off his face although the room was air-conditioned. "A lot of people in high places are going to be in big trouble if we don't get that stuff back fast," he said.

"I'm sick of people in high places who are so concerned with their own power that they have to operate forever undercover," Chambrun said. "I don't care who gets into big trouble."

"Since we have no idea who it is, what's to stop him from just checking out of the hotel with my documents in his luggage?" Wilson asked. "Will you subject everybody to a search before they leave the hotel?"

Chambrun's cold eyes seemed to be buried in their deep pouches. "I don't think that will be necessary," he said. He turned to Nevers. "However, Karl, let me know if anyone tries to check out before the normal time this morning. If anyone tries, stall until I get to them."

"Yes, sir."

Chambrun gave Wilson a thoughtful look. "You're a professional, Mr. Wilson, at this sort of thing."

"I don't follow you," Wilson said.

"Spy and counterspy, all perfectly legal, of course. Suppose you knew an enemy agent had important documents in our vault, how would you go about getting them?"

Wilson shrugged. "This fellow knew his job pretty well," he said. "I don't know that I could improve on it."

"Probably not," Chambrun said. "There's just one thing this man didn't know when he was planning."

"Oh?" Wilson said.

"That when the alarm was turned off in the vault a certain way it set off another alarm, a silent one, that warned us the vault was being robbed. He couldn't have anticipated that. He thought he had plenty of time, with Nevers and Mrs. Paradine locked inside the vault. He'd planned his escape by way of the northwest fire stairs and unexpectedly he ran into Schooley. So he had to kill."

"In my experience," Wilson

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said, "there's always something unexpected happening. You have to be trained to act without hesitation in any emergency."

"But this man must have had an escape plan as well as his plan to get into the vault, wouldn't you say?"

Wilson nodded. "They'd be equally important," he said.

"So this man planned to make his escape by way of the northwest fire stairs," Chambrun said. "He only had to walk a few yards across the lobby to the stairway door, carrying the brief case, of course. He assumed there had been no alarm, so he didn't have to move so fast that he'd attract attention."

"Sounds logical," Wilson said.

"He must have checked out the ground pretty thoroughly, wouldn't you say?" Chambrun sounded almost casual.

"As I've said, he was obviously a professional."

Chambrun put out his cigarette in an ashtray on the telephone table. He actually smiled at Wilson. "Since he knew the hotel so well," he said, "why do you suppose our man headed *up* the northwest stairway instead of *down?* There's no escape from the upper levels. He must have known that."

"That's pretty obvious, isn't it?" Wilson said. "He started down, found the way blocked by someone alerted by the alarm he didn't know about, and had no choice but to head up in the hope of escaping somewhere into the upper levels of the hotel."

"And ran into Schooley?"

"Must have," Wilson said.

Chambrun seemed to consider this for a moment. "There could be another explanation," he said. "He always *meant* to go up—to his room."

"Could be," Wilson said, "if he had a room."

"I'm inclined to think he does have a room," Chambrun said. He smiled again. "You know, I've had some experience with crime, Mr. Wilson. I always try to put myself in the criminal's mind and think as he might have thought. I assume these documents he stole would be worth a great deal of money to the thief—perhaps blackmail money?"

"You can say that again," Wilson said.

"Being a professional, this man must have recognized the danger of being caught with the documents in his possession. He'd want to get them off his person just as fast as he could, in case anything went wrong."

"You mean, hide them?" Wilson asked.

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"Something like that," Chambrun said. "Of course, if he was caught he'd have some difficulty getting back to the hiding place."

"A confederate?" Wilson suggested.

"Would you share a big financial bonanza with someone else, Mr. Wilson?"

Wilson shrugged. "There might not be any other choice. Not in advance, I wouldn't. If I was caught I might get help from my lawyer, for example. But I wouldn't cut anyone in ahead of time."

"And he would know we'd search the hotel from top to bottom," Chambrun said, "so he'd have prepared a safe hiding place."

"Yes, he would."

I could see Jerry Dodd champing at the bit. Chambrun's theorizing wasn't getting us anywhere and Schooley's killer was still at large somewhere in the hotel.

"And that hiding place would have to be somewhere not far from this vault room if he was to dispose of the brief case quickly." Chambrun turned to Jerry Dodd. "Let's walk over what must have been his escape route, Jerry. He'd walk from here through the outer office. He stopped there to take off his mask and then his raincoat—"

We walked into the outer office, Chambrun pausing by the old-fashioned hatrack. He looked around the office.

"No place to hide a brief case here," he said.

We went out into the lobby. It was buzzing with people, mostly staff, who knew what had happened. Ordinarily there would only have been the cleaning crew there at four thirty in the morning. Chambrun headed toward the northwest fire-door exit, Wilson, Jerry, and I following him. He stopped at the door. Just to the left of it was a large mailbox, with slots for letters and larger packages. Chambrun looked at Jerry.

"Can you open that mailbox, Jerry?" he asked.

"At the risk of spending the rest of my natural life in jail," Jerry said.

"That's a Federal offense."

"Let's risk it," Chambrun said.

"What's the idea?" Jerry asked. He didn't like it.

"I'm trying to think like our man," Chambrun said. "I'd have come prepared to get rid of that brief case quickly. It would not be easy to hide. But if I had a large envelope prepared that would hold it, all I'd have to do would be to drop it in a mailbox, addressed to some prearranged post-office

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box, and let Uncle Sam protect it for me.

"He'd been over the ground. He knew this mailbox was here, only a few yards from the vault room. He probably put the brief case in his prepared, stamped envelope when he discarded his coat and mask in the outer office. He walks, innocent as you please, across the lobby to this box and mails his package, quite openly. Open it up, Jerry."

Jerry produced some kind of kit from his pocket and went to work on the mailbox lock. It evidently wasn't very complicated because he got it open almost at once. The big box was half full and Chambrun fumbled around with the contents. Like a magician pulling a rabbit out of his hat he produced a large manila envelope. He read us the address.

P.O. Box 1724
Grand Central Post Office
New York, N.Y. 10017

Chambrun handed the package to Wilson. "I don't think we should compound our Federal offenses by opening it, Mr. Wilson, but would you guess from the feel of it that we might have your brief case here?"

Wilson took the envelope and felt it carefully. "By God, I think you've found it, Mr. Chambrun," he said.

Chambrun almost snatched the package away from Wilson and he wasn't smiling any more. "Check this for the fingerprints Mr. Wilson just made, Jerry," he said. "I think you'll find that the prints on this package match the one you took off the electronic device on Mr. Wilson's phone."

Jerry opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. Chambrun turned to Wilson.

"You were headed upstairs for your room when you ran into Schooley, weren't you, Wilson? Your fingerprints on that package have blown the ball game. You bugged your own phone to make us think someone else was involved. You had to stage the robbery so that the people in Washington would never think of you as the thief. The subsequent blackmailing of higher-ups would appear to be the work of the man who robbed you."

Wilson was sweating again. He looked around like someone trapped, then made a quick move away from us.

"Hold it right there, Wilson!" Jerry Dodd shouted. He'd produced a gun. "Your body will look like a hunk of Swiss cheese if you take one more step."

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A couple of Jerry's security boys took charge of Wilson. We stood, watching him being taken away. He would be charged with homicide and robbery.

"Those C.I.A. boys are taught all kinds of things, including karate," Chambrun said, then sighed. "It was mighty bad luck for Schooley."

"I damn near blew it," Jerry said. "You know there was no fingerprint on that telephone gadget. It was too small to take a clear print."

Chambrun's smile was grim. "But Wilson didn't know that," he said. "I wanted him to make a move, just to be certain."

CRIMINALIMERICK

NO EXTRA CHARGE

by D. R. BENSEN

If you'd live sybaritically well,
Try a week at the Beaumont Hotel;
Lead the life of a toff
And if you're bumped off,
They'll capture your killer as well.

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continuing the *NEW* Petrella series by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

"The mother of Sisera looked out of her window and cried, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' "

As Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella of Q Division said, "It was pure Old Testament"...

RETURN OF THE HERO

by MICHAEL GILBERT

That morning, because his wife and small son were away at the seaside, Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella cooked his own breakfast. He should have been with them, but his stand-in had broken his wrist in an argument with an Irish truck driver and his second-in-command had mumps.

As he walked through the sun-baked streets, from his flat in Passmore Gardens to the Divisional Substation on Patton Street, there was an ache at the back of his neck and a buzzing in his ears, and his tongue felt a size too large for his mouth. Any competent doctor would have diagnosed strain from overwork and packed him straight off on holiday.

The morning was taken up with a new outbreak of shoplifting. In the middle of the afternoon the telex message was brought into his room.

"Important. Repeated to all stations in Q Division and for information to other Divisions. Arthur Lamson's conviction was quashed by the Court of Criminal Appeal at 3 o'clock this afternoon."

Petrella was still trying to work through all the unpleasant possibilities of this message when Superintendent Watterson arrived.

He said, "I see you've had

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the news, Patrick. It was that ass Downing who did it."

He referred, in this disrespectful manner, to Lord Justice Downing, one of the more unpredictable of Her Majesty's Judges.

"I was afraid it might happen," said Petrella.

He spoke so flatly that Watterson looked at him and said, "You ought to be on leave. Are you feeling all right?"

"It's the heat. A decent thunderstorm would clear the air."

"What we want," said Watterson, "isn't a decent thunderstorm. It's a decent bench of judges. Not a crowd of nit-picking old women. I wonder if they've got the remotest idea of how much damage a man like Lamson can do."

"There'll be no holding him now," said Petrella.

Arthur Lamson was once described by the newspapers as the unofficial mayor of Grendel Street. He ran a gymnasium and sporting club there, was a big donor to all local charities, and had a cheerful word and a pat on the head for any child, or a pinch of the bottom for any pretty girl. He was also a criminal, who specialized in protection rackets, employing the youths who hung around his gymnasium to break up the premises—and occasionally the persons—of anyone who refused him payment.

Since he took no part in these acts of violence himself he had been a difficult man to peg. Indeed, he might have continued untouched by the law for a very long time if he had not fallen out with Bruno.

Bruno was a fair-haired boy, with a deceptively open face and a smile that showed every one of the thirty-two teeth in his mouth. He was a great favorite with the girls, and it was over a girl that the original trouble arose. There were other differences as well. Bruno had an unexpected streak of obstinacy. When he was not paid as much as he had been promised for a job he had done for Art Lamson, he spoke his mind, and spoke it loudly and publicly.

Lamson had decided he must be disciplined. The disciplining took place in a quiet back street behind the Goods Depot.

While Bruno was in the hospital, having his jaw set and the bottom half of his right ear sewn back on, he came to certain conclusions. He told no one what he proposed to do, not even Jackie, the girl he was secretly engaged to. He went one evening to a quiet public house in the Tooley Street area,

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and in a back room overlooking the river he met two men who looked like sailors. To them he talked, and they wrote down all that he said, and gave him certain instructions.

A month later Bruno said to Jackie, "I don't think any of the boys know you're my girl, so you ought to be all right, but you'd better lie low for a bit. I'm going to have to clear out of London."

Jackie said, "What are you talking about, Bruno? What's going to happen? What have you done?"

"What I've done," said Bruno, "is I've shopped Art Lamson. The Regional boys are picking him up tonight. With what I've been able to tell them, they reckon they've got him sewn up."

Jackie put both arms round Bruno's neck, her blue eyes full of tears, and said, "Look after yourself, boy. If anything happened to you I don't know what I should do."

Very early on the following morning two cars, with four men in each of them, slid to a stop opposite Lamson's house. Two men went round to the back, two men watched the front, and four men let themselves into the house, using a key to unlock the front door. Petrella was one of them. Grendel Street was in his manor and it was his job to make the actual arrest, and to charge Lamson, on information received, with the crime of conspiring with others to demand money with menaces and to commit actual bodily harm.

The nature of the information received became evident at the preliminary hearing in the Magistrate's Court. It was Bruno. And it was noticed that never once, while he gave his evidence, did he look at Lamson or Lamson at him.

This was in March.

The trial started at the Old Bailey in the first week of June. Bruno was brought to the court, from a safe hideaway in Essex, in a police van which had steel bars on its windows and bulletproof glass.

On the second afternoon he gave his evidence to the Judge. Under the skillful questioning of his own counsel he repeated, even more clearly and comprehensively, the facts he had already stated to the Magistrate. At four o'clock he had finished, and the Judge said, "It will be convenient if we break now. We can begin the cross-examination of this witness tomorrow morning."

Counsel bowed to the Judge, the Judge bowed back, the Court emptied, and Bruno was taken down a flight of steps to

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the basement where the van awaited him.

As he stepped out of the door, a marksman on the roof of a neighboring building, using an Armalite rifle with a telescopic sight, shot him through the head.

"And that," said Watterson, "was that. The Jury had heard Bruno's evidence, and they convicted Lamson. Of course, there was an appeal. The defense pointed out that although plenty of people had given evidence of being intimidated, the only witness who actually identified Lamson as the head of the organization was Bruno."

And Bruno had not been cross-examined.

"How can you accept his evidence," said Mr. Marston, Q.C., in his eloquent address to the Court of Criminal Appeal, "when it has not been tested, in the traditional way, by cross-examination? Bear in mind, too, that the witness was himself a criminal. That he had, by his own admission, taken part in more than one of the offenses with which the accused is charged. The law is slow to accept the evidence of an accomplice, even when it has stood the test of cross-examination—"

And so, at three o'clock on that hot afternoon in August, Arthur Lamson descended the stairs which lead from the dock in the Court of Criminal Appeal and emerged, a free man.

A considerable reception awaited him. The committee of welcome consisted of a number of reporters, mainly from the sporting papers, but a scattering from the national press as well; one or two minor celebrities who didn't care where they went as long as they got into the photograph; members of the Grendel Street Sporting Club; and friends and hangers-on of both sexes.

The party started immediately in the bar of the Law Courts, but this was too small to contain everyone who wanted to get in on the act. A move was made to a small club behind Fleet Street which was broad-minded about membership and seemed to observe its own licensing hours.

By six o'clock the party was larger than when it had started, and much louder. Lamson had a six months' thirst to quench, and he stood, at the center of the noisiest group, a schooner of whiskey in his large right hand, the sweat running in rivulets down his red face, a monarch who had been unjustly deposed and was now returning in triumph to his kingdom.

"I got a great respect for the Laws of England," he an-

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nounced. "They don't put an innocent man in prison. Not like some countries I could name."

"That's right, Art," said the chorus.

"I'm not saying anything against the police. They've got their job to do, like I've got mine. If they're prepared to let bygones be bygones, I'm prepared to do the same."

This offer of a treaty of friendship to the police force was felt to be in the best of taste, and a fresh round of drinks was ordered.

Back in Grendel Street extensive preparations had been made for the return of the hero. Streamers had been placed in position, from top-story windows, spanning the street, and banners had been hung out with WELCOME HOME, ART embroidered on them in letters of red cotton-wool. The two public houses—The Wheelwrights Arms at one end of the street and The Duke of Albany at the other end—were both doing a roaring trade, and the band of the Railway Recreational Club was starting on its favorite piece, which was the William Tell Overture.

The organizer of these festivities was seated at her bedroom window, in a chair, looking down on the street. This was old Mrs. Lamson, Art's mother, the matriarch of Grendel Street. Ma Lamson was a character in her own right. She had married, outdrunk, outtalked, and outlived three husbands, the third of whom was Art's father. A stroke had paralyzed her legs, but not her tongue. Confined to a wheel chair, and rendered even more impatient by her confinement, her shrill voice still dominated the street.

"Fix the end of that streamer, you big git," she screeched. "It's flapping like a lot of bloody washing on a line. That's better. My God, if I wasn't here to keep an eye on things, you'd have the whole bloody lot down in the bloody street. And Albert"—this was to a middle-aged man, one of her sons by her first marriage, himself a grandfather—"clear those bloody fools back onto the pavement."

She indicated the drinkers outside The Wheelwrights Arms who were sketching an informal eightsome reel to the strains of William Tell. "We want Art to drive straight down the street when he comes home, don't we? He can't do it if they've turned it into a pally-de-dance, can he?"

By eight o'clock the original party had moved from the Fleet Street club and re-established itself in the backroom of a

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public house near Blackfriars Station. Its constituents had gradually changed. The journalists had slid away, to write up their impressions of the event for next morning's papers. The minor celebrities had gone in search of the next happening to which they could attach themselves. What remained was a hard core of serious drinkers, a few friends of Art's, but mostly friends of friends, or those complete strangers who seem to have a knack of attaching themselves to any party which has reached a stage of general euphoria.

One of the few men there who knew Art personally said, toward nine o'clock, "You ought to be getting back sometime soon. Your old lady'll be expecting you."

"That's right," said Art, "she will." He made no attempt to move.

"She's got a sort of reception organized, I understand."

"She's a lovely person," said Art. "I'm lucky to have a mother like that. Have you got a mother?"

The friend said that he had a mother, and she was a lovely person too.

Toward ten o'clock the black clouds which had been piling up from the west had blotted out moon and stars and the air was electric with the coming storm.

The party was showing signs of disintegrating. There were no formal farewells. People drifted out and did not reappear. For some time now Art had been conscious of the girl. To start with, there had been quite a few girls in the party. This one had sat quietly in the background drinking whatever was put into her hand and minding her own business. Nobody knew exactly who had brought her, but nobody minded because she was a good-looking chick, with blue eyes, black hair, and lots up top. Not obtrusive, but enough to catch the eye.

Art found his thoughts centering on the girl. Drink was not the only thing he had been deprived of for the past six months. When she looked up at him and smiled, what had been vague stirrings became clear desire.

How it happened he was not clear. At one moment he was putting down an empty glass on the counter, at the next he was on the back seat of the taxi with the girl.

He slid one arm round her waist. She said, "Don't start anything here, love. The taxi driver'll sling us out. Wait till we get there."

"Where are we going?"

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The girl sounded surprised. "Back to my place, of course," she said.

Art was happy to wait. He was three out of four parts drunk. One thing was puzzling him. If this chick really had been knocking back all the drinks that had been offered to her, she should have been blind drunk, but she sounded sober. A bit tensed up, he thought, but cool. Perhaps she had a very hard head. She certainly had a beautiful little body.

Her place was a surprise too. It was certainly not a tart's pad. It was on the third floor of an old-fashioned house and had the look of a working-girl's flat, small but neat. She sat him down on the sofa, and said, "What about a bite of food, eh?"

This seemed to Art to be an excellent suggestion. He needed something solid to absorb the alcohol he had poured into himself. The girl gave him a drink from a bottle on the sideboard. She said, "I won't be a minute," and disappeared into the small room which was evidently the kitchen.

Art sipped his drink and lay back on the sofa. He had had so much luck lately that this little extra bit seemed a natural bonus. The only trouble was that he was feeling bloody sleepy. It really would be a bad joke if, with this gorgeous chick offering herself to him, he couldn't stay awake to do anything about it.

He laughed and the laugh turned into a snort, and then into a strangled snore.

Five minutes later the girl reappeared. She picked up the glass, which had rolled onto the floor, and stared down at Art, full length on the sofa, his face red and sweating, his mouth wide-open. There was no expression in her blue eyes at all.

First she moved over and shot the bolt on the door. Then she went to a closet in the corner of the room. It seemed to have household stuff in it. She selected what she needed, and came back.

When the storm broke, Petrella was sitting in the charge room at Patton Street talking to Superintendent Watterson.

"This should cool their heads," said the Superintendent. "They've been jazzing it up since opening time."

"Has the great man put in an appearance yet?"

He was answered by the telephone. It was Ma Lamson. Her voice had in it anger, vexation, and an edge of fear. Petrella found it difficult to make out what she was saying.

He said, "Hold on a

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minute," and to Watterson, "She says Art hasn't turned up, and she's worried something may have happened to him. I can't really make out what she wants. I'd better go down and have a word with her."

"Watch it, Patrick. They all know it was you who pulled him in. They'll still be hot about it."

"No one could stay hot in this weather," said Petrella. The rain was now coming down solidly. He drove down to Grendel Street in a police car, stopped it at the end, turned up the collar of his raincoat, and went forward on foot.

The street was empty, its gutters running with water. Overhead the banners of welcome flapped, damp and forlorn. The band had cased its instruments and hurried home.

Only Ma Lamson kept vigil at her upstairs window. The rain, blowing in, had soaked her white hair which hung, in dank ropes, on both sides of her pink face.

"Where is he?" she screeched. "Where's my boy? Art wouldn't let us down. Something's happened to him, I know. 'E'd got enemies, Inspector. They'll have been laying for him. You've got to do something!"

Petrella stood in the pelting rain and looked up at the old woman. The release of the storm had cleared his head. It had done more. It had made him almost light-headed. He felt an almost hysterical urge to laugh.

Restraining it, he promised that a general alert should be sent out, and made his way back to Patton Street.

He said dreamily to Watterson, "It was pure Old Testament."

"What are you talking about?"

The Superintendent knew that Petrella had a reputation for eccentricity. He had once quoted poetry at a meeting of the top brass at Scotland Yard, and had got away with it because it was Rabbie Burns, who happened to be the Assistant Commissioner's favorite poet.

"The mother of Sisera looked out of her window and cried, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' "

"Who the hell was Sisera?"

"He was a King in Canaan. When he was on his way back to a triumphant welcome, organized by his mother, he was lured into the tent of a young lady called Jael."

"And what did she do?"

"He asked for water, and she gave him milk. She brought forth butter, in a lordly dish."

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"I see," said Watterson doubtfully. "And what happened then?"

"Then she took a mallet in one hand and a tent peg in the other, and she smote him. At her feet he bowed, he fell. Where he fell, there he lay down, dead."

"What you need is a holiday," said Watterson firmly. "You're going on leave first thing tomorrow, if I have to stand in for you myself."

Five days later, when the police, alerted by worried neighbors, broke into the third-floor flat of Bruno's girl, Jackie, they found Art Lamson.

Jackie had driven a six-inch nail clean through the middle of his forehead, and had then cut her own throat. But Petrella knew nothing of this. He was helping his small son to construct a sand fort and adorn its battlements with shells from the sea.

"Q"

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Another adventure in high diplomacy in which Sir Vyvyan Bultivant, near the twilight of his brilliant service to the remnants of Empire, becomes the Governor General of a Paradise on Earth and is faced with the delicate task of preserving that Paradise. But then he had the help of King Walilolo IV, a most ingenious Polynesian . . . Jacob Hay's stories of the British Foreign Service are tales of beauty—there's nothing quite like them under the sun that never sets on the mystery Empire . . .

THE CERULIANA CAPER

by JACOB HAY

It is possible to suggest that Her Britannic Majesty's Foreign Office was moved more by ancestral instinct than by its computers in selecting Sir Vyvyan Bultivant to be the Governor General of the Pacific island kingdom of Ceruliana, which just might be the closest thing to a Paradise on this Earth. He was just the man for the job.

For nearly two decades prior to his appointment Sir Vyvyan had assisted materially in the dissolution of his nation's once-mighty Empire. Did a newly emergent former Colony need advice on how to establish a Parliament? Did it need words of wisdom on how to set up its own equivalent of New Scotland Yard? Bultivant was there with the answers. He was the Queen's recognized expert in the demanding and tricky job of insuring that one fine evening the sun would indeed set on the British Empire.

It was a wearying task, especially for one whose ancestor, Lord Horatio Bultivant, known to his intimates as "Dashing Horry," had subdued large areas of various segments of Africa with Bultivant's Light Horse, supported by two field batteries and an Anglican chaplain versed

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in Swahili. On his mother's side Admiral Sir Makepeace Upsham, notable for his skill with frigates and a slightly less adept hand with sloops-of-war, had sailed up practically every bay and river in Asia to maintain the Queen's sovereignty.

"Bultivant is looking a bit peaky," Her Majesty's Foreign Secretary remarked shortly after Sir Vyvyan had returned from making the quondam British Protectorate of Sonnava Gon, in the Indian Ocean, safe for democracy. "He deserves a change of pace, something restful for a change."

"May I suggest Ceruliana, sir," said the Permanent Undersecretary cautiously.

"Sound thinking, Carruthers! Deuced sound," replied the Foreign Secretary heartily. "For the first time in twenty years he won't be hauling down the flag."

It was true; Bultivant was looking peaky. His tour in Sonnava Gon had not been an easy one, and it had not been a simple task to convince the reigning Emir that it was better to debate the issues with his loyal opposition than to have them all beheaded, a point taken with some difficulty by many Indian Ocean rulers. With the departure of British garrisons and the immediate presence of benign British justice, decapitation had become something of a hobby. The tall lean Bultivant frame had acquired a slight stoop, and there was more gray hair on his head than his 50-odd years deserved. Happily, so far as this brief narrative is concerned, there remained steadfast the whimsical gleam in his bright blue eyes.

The Governor Generalship of Ceruliana was, and continues to be, regarded as one of the rare plums of the British Foreign Service. Ceruliana wants no part of independence. It emerged—to use the currently fashionable diplomatic expression—as far as it wanted to emerge in the spring of 1891, when its monarch, the late King Walilolo, asked for and got the protection of the British flag in return for the rights to maintain a coaling station on the island that would have been strategically useful only in the event that the British planned to attack New Zealand.

As of Bultivant's appointment, Ceruliana was ruled by His Majesty, King Walilolo IV, M.A., Oxon., plus a string of initials signifying his membership in a number of British

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orders. He had won his M.C. at El Alamein in command of the Royal Ceruliana Rifles; his D.S.C. had come later, in Italy. Most importantly, so far as the events of this account are involved, he had been up at New College, Oxford, on the same staircase as Bultivant, and the tall slender Englishman and the somewhat stockier but equally handsome Polynesian had become fast friends, the more as Bultivant agreed fully with the young future King's determination to keep his beautiful island kingdom as unspoiled as the world would permit.

In this aim Walilolo IV had succeeded far better than even he had dared to hope. The exposure of the men of the Royal Ceruliana Rifles to the wiles of Africa and Europe had made them all the more eager to return as quickly as possible to their homes and their simple way of life.

The royal palace was merely a larger version of the bungalows in which most of the kingdom's inhabitants lived, situated in the center of the small town of Cerula, on the Bay of Palms, which was the capital. It was some unknown official of the British Foreign Office who, it must be assumed, figured that the name Cerula sounded vaguely Finnish and so, to ward off the snows and icy winds of that northern clime, had decreed that the Governor General's house should take the well-tested form of a Scottish castle, and thus it had been built, to become the largest, most improbable edifice in all Ceruliana. However, so benign was the island's climate that it was entirely livable, and those Governors General who had occupied it remembered it fondly.

Sir Vyvyan Bultivant took the news of his new appointment joyously. Increasingly in recent years he had had the feeling that if he had to throw away one more island or one more chunk of desert, he would go out of his mind. In consequence, the reunion, when Bultivant stepped from the Royal New Zealand Air Force plane which had brought him to Cerula's miniscule air strip, was a touching one as King Walilolo IV stepped out to greet him.

"Vyv,' " cried His Majesty, with feeling. "Good show!"

"Wally," replied Bultivant cheerily. "You haven't changed a bit. Come have a drink at Government House."

"Done and done," said His Majesty heartily.

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It took Bultivant only a day or two to realize that all the many good things he'd read and heard about Ceruliana were absolutely true, even understated. To begin with, the natives fully lived up to their advance notices as the most cheerful and naturally courteous Polynesians in all the Pacific Ocean. The fish that swam in their island waters were the most succulent; the vegetables they grew in their gardens were the juiciest and most flavorful.

At Government House, Bultivant, who was a bachelor, found that his ever-solicitous staff made him feel as if he had married not one but a dozen wives. His morning tea was always steaming on its impeccably arranged tray, along with a freshly ironed copy of *The Cerula Daily Mail.* His solar topee was kept dazzling white; his shoes gleamed; he could have shaved with his trouser creases. His cook, Lakani, formerly Mess Sergeant of the Royal Ceruliana Rifles, could roast pig as well as Claridge's could roast beef, and his baked taro on palm leaves was nothing short of superb.

And for good company and conversation there was always Walilolo IV and his cousin and Prime Minister, Prince Omeamunu, who was a very decent chap for all that he had been up at Cambridge.

So this happy situation continued for the first six months of Bultivant's appointment. Then a cloud no larger than a man's hand appeared on the horizon in the form of a personal note from an old friend in London.

"Dear Vyvyan," Bultivant read, "would you be good enough to extend your courtesy to Mr. Leonard Midderley, who is chairman of the board of Midderley International Hotels & Motor Inns, Ltd., and who plans to arrive in Cerula shortly to discuss a matter of considerable importance with you and His Majesty, the King. He will be arriving early next month by the regular weekly flight of South Pacific Airways. Will notify you by radio as to exact date. Cannot overemphasize the importance of this visit as to the kingdom's economic well-being. Yours, etc."

Oh, Lord, Bultivant thought unhappily. All England and large parts of the outside world knew of Leonard Midderley and his meteoric rise from simple publican to hotel magnate, a rise initiated when he and Mrs.

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Midderley had visited their married daughter in the United States and had stopped overnight at a Howard Johnson's Motel. Immediately on his return to the United Kingdom, Mr. Midderley had borrowed and scraped up sufficient pounds to add a hideous modern bedroom wing to the thatched-roof, half-timbered charm of his XVth Century Boar's Head, on the main Southampton-London road.

American tourists, in their rented cars and gasping at the quaintness of it all, nonetheless were delighted to discover, as they neared the end of the long and exhausting drive to London—on the wrong side of the road!—the equivalent of an American motel in the English countryside. "Children Under 12 Free! TV in Every Room!" The Boar's Head prospered beyond Leonard Midderley's most fantastic dreams, and Midderley Motels was on its way, first throughout the United Kingdom, then on the French Riviera, on to the Greek and Turkish coasts, to North Africa, to the Costa del Sol—so it inexorably went.

And now it seemed, Bultivant reflected, Ceruliana was next on that greedy list. Further, he thought angrily, what the devil was wrong with Ceruliana's economic well-being to begin with? Its annual crop of the finest copra produced in the Pacific and its milky coconuts always fetched top prices and more than sufficed the kingdom's modest needs. What Ceruliana definitely did *not* need was one of those horrible Midderley International Hotels and a concomitant "tourist industry."

It was a matter for immediate and decisive discussion with King Walilolo IV.

"Come over for a sundowner and we'll talk about it," His Majesty said affably in response to Bultivant's telephone call.

"It's damnable, Wally, and you know it," Bultivant declared bitterly, as he sat with the king on the veranda of the royal palace, sipping a pink gin that sat like vinegar on his tongue. "How could it happen?"

"Easy, Vyv. How could it happen? I suspect this Midderley chap has his eye on the old duPlessis plantation. French family that came out here in the eighteen-sixties and hoodwinked my great grandfather into a land grant.

"They've always been ab-

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sentee landlords and, all things considered, good ones, but they've died off over the years, and as I understand it, their fortunes in France were ruined during the war. So what's left of the family is probably only too glad to sell off a plantation none of them has ever seen—there hasn't been a duPlessis on the island since the nineteen-twenties. It's a superb area, near Luvala on the northern coast, with at least three miles of virgin beach."

"Oh, God," moaned Bultivant. "But isn't there anything we can do to stop this man? Can't you issue a royal decree, or something? Revoke the grant? Anything?"

"Not a damned thing, Vyv. At least, not under the legal code you British drew up for us. My royal powers are, to say the least, limited. However, there are other solutions. I have been giving the problem some thought."

"Such as?" Bultivant asked, brightening. "I confess I haven't an idea in the world."

"A reversion to primitive savagery," King Walilolo suggested gravely. "Doubtless, this Midderley will have been briefed on Ceruliana in London to the effect that we are a Pacific paradise. But London could be wrong—which, I'm afraid, would be nothing new. When Midderley arrives, he could find an island in turmoil."

"Savagery? Turmoil?" Bultivant asked in bewilderment. "But both are utterly foreign to Ceruliana, Wally."

"Then we'll have to invent some, right? It shouldn't be too difficult. Let's see." The King mused briefly. "Omeamunu here shall organize a revolt among the northern head-hunters—"

"But there are no head-hunters in the north," Bultivant protested, "or anywhere on the island."

"But Midderley can't be sure of that. Perhaps London was misleading him. Perhaps, too, London hasn't told him that I am plotting to liberate Ceruliana."

"You are?" Bultivant stared.

"And drive out the foreign devils, as well," His Majesty continued calmly. "With, naturally, the customary expropriation of property and the concomitant land reforms."

"Damned shame Ceruliana isn't ripe for rebellion, old boy," murmured Prince Omeamunu, grinning at his

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cousin. "You'd be a natural."

"Further," His Majesty added imperturbably, "in the interest of reviving our Cerulianian national pride, I may well re-establish some of our ancient customs. I rather fancy the ritual sacrifice of a virgin thrown into the sea from the top of Kowlinga Head to appease the gods of the waters. A small roasted boy might make an appropriate offering to the gods who rule our copra crop—I feel quite certain that Mr. Midderley will, in the frame of mind I hope to produce in him, be unable to differentiate between a small roasted boy and a small roasted pig."

"About this revolt I'm supposed to lead—?" Prince Omeamunu asked dubiously.

"Simple, my dear cousin. Take a platoon of the Rifles into the hills above Akoaka and try a bit of target practise. Every afternoon. And don't spare the ammunition. Come to think of it, it's just about time for their annual field exercises anyway."

"And who am I supposed to be?" Omeamunu persisted.

"The Accursed Usurper, who has vowed to fight on until every last one of my loyalist followers has been slain, to fight on for years if necessary," replied the King. "I, of course, have vowed eternal resistance. Not a bad scenario, though I say it myself."

"Positively brilliant," Bultivant agreed. "We shall have to bring the Bishop in on the scheme, of course." He grinned. "Terrorized by your reversion to primitive ways, he shall find sanctuary in Government House where, naturally, the radio, our sole means of communication with London, will, regrettably, have broken down."

The Right Reverend David Hanaloa, the Anglican Bishop of Ceruliana, when advised of the scheme, was more than delighted to become a part of it. "I shall look as abject as an early Christian martyr," he declared cheerfully, and Bultivant reflected that, as the founding father and prime mover of the Cerula Amateur Theatrical Club, the Bishop could undoubtedly pull it off.

As to his own role in the affair, Bultivant rather fancied himself in one of the late Sir C. Aubrey Smith's old parts, a garrison commander on India's Northwest Frontier, beleaguered and outnumbered by a mad Khan, as played by the late Basil Rathbone.

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Two days after this scheme was hatched, a radiogram advised Bultivant that Mr. Leonard Midderley would arrive in Cerula in precisely two weeks. So there was ample time. As of that radiogram's arrival, Bultivant gave up his refreshing morning shave and gave orders to his astonished household staff that henceforward his clothing was to be left unpressed, his shoes unshined. Further, morning tea would be served lukewarm, as would all meals.

"It's just a temporary measure, my dear fellow," he assured Daniel Urnamoa, the Government House majordomo and late Sergeant Major of the Royal Ceruliana Rifles. "Purely a tactical move, nothing more. But for the time being I should like you to reduce this place to something of a shambles, and I leave it to you to convince our most excellent staff to provide only the most slovenly and surly of services. Be a good chap, and do what you can."

In on the scheme from the beginning had been Bultivant's aide-de-camp, Captain the Hon. Peter fitz-ttench, a most amiable and efficient young man as well as a most enthusiastic member of the Cerula Amateur Theatrical Club, and noted for his excellent imitations of Sir Noel Coward. He was scheduled to go under house arrest for drunkenness on duty, and spent much of his spare time in his room polishing his alcoholic lispings and slurrings and unsteady gait.

Prince Omeamunu and the First Platoon of the Royal Ceruliana Rifles had marched jauntily off to the hills above the village of Akoaka, courteously pausing en route to advise the village residents that they were out for a bit of harmless target practise and that things might become a bit noisy at times.

The King himself was far from idle. With the aid of his valet and former batman in the Rifles he devised a means of strapping a pillow over his abdomen and under his *taku-taku*, the Cerulianian version of the sarong, which left his torso bare.

The effect was to give him the absurdly gross gut of a Japanese sumo wrestler. Put aside for the nonce were the exquisitely cut suits he'd had custom-tailored in Hong Kong and London. Gone were the London shoes that usually adorned his now bare feet. But his greatest personal sacrifice came when he ordered his valet to shave his head absolutely

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bald. He looked simply awful, but the barbaric effect was much enhanced.

Probably not since the Relief of Lucknow had such a seedy greeting party met an arriving dignitary as met Mr. Leonard Midderley when he stepped off the elderly South Pacific Airways D-C 3 onto the Cerula airstrip. There was Bultivant, with a two-day stubble of beard on his cheeks, his solar topee as stained and battered as his once white suit was rumpled. There was Captain fitz-ttench, weaving ever so slightly, his ADC's usually immaculate uniform creased and conspicuously grease-spotted, his boots dulled with purposeful neglect.

"I've brought the Land Rover instead of the limousine, Mr. Midderley," Bultivant explained in what he hoped sounded like a hoarse croak. "Captain fitz-ttench thinks it's best we get back to Government House as inconspicuously and as quickly as possible. There's been a spot of trouble."

"Thash the bloody trufe," confirmed the Captain, and unsuccessfully suppressed a belch. "Lesh get the hell out of here." (fitz-ttench was much pleased with his belch; it had had just the right stifled resonance.)

It was a badly shaken Leonard Midderley whom Bultivant escorted into Government House. The Governor General was clearly close to a nervous breakdown, and his ADC was all too obviously sloshed to the ears, undoubtedly from fright. Shaken, but not panic-stricken, for Leonard Midderley had not risen from pubkeeper to hotel tycoon on the strength of no guts. Years of mounting success and good living had put a paunch on the lean young former Corporal of Royal Marines who had come out of the commandoes to marry the daughter of the owner of The Boar's Head, and pouches and jowls had fleshed out the face; but Leonard Midderley still knew how to take charge in a tight situation.

"Just what the hell is going on around here?" he demanded to know of Bultivant as Major-domo Daniel Urnamoa shambled into the library, his usually spotless white jacket flapping unbuttoned, with a tray of drinks.

"It's been hell, sir. Everything's come unstuck. Let me explain the situation as best I can," Bultivant replied.

"Thash a laugh," Captain fitz-ttench giggled. "How'n hell can anybody exshplain anything about this damn Island?"

"Captain fitz-ttench," Bultivant appeared to explode, "you will retire to your quarters and

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consider yourself under arrest for conduct unbecoming an officer!"

" 'Shokay with me, surr, your Guvnorship." With which, Captain fitz-ttench weaved unsteadily out of the room.

"Been a bit of a strain on him, I'm afraid," Bultivant explained apologetically. "Only two days ago he was nearly ambushed by Omeamunu's headhunters. Bit of a near thing, that."

"Did you say headhunters?" Mr. Midderley asked incredulously. "I *did* hear you say headhunters?"

At this point in the conversation the Anglican Bishop entered, his shoulders stooped, his face a picture of purest anguish. "What good," he asked dramatically, "is the sanctuary of Government House, what good is the protection of the Crown if Omeamunu's people can, with impunity, burn down the Chapel of All Saints-in-the-Woods, along with the Sunday School building?"

"It might have been Walilolo's own troops, Bishop," Bultivant said. "They've been restive lately. No telling where their loyalty really lies. Quite possibly with Wa Ching." He turned courteously to the now thoroughly bemused Midderley. "Wa Ching, I should explain, is one of our local Chinese merchants who, I have reason to believe, may be an agent of the Red Chinese government. But he is only another of our worries here in Ceruliana, I can assure you. First and foremost, there is King Walilolo, a strange, moody man, utterly unpredictable."

"How do you mean—unpredictable?"

"You will see during the audience I have arranged for you with His Majesty tomorrow morning. But perhaps now we can turn from our own tangled problems to a happier subject, your visit. I understand from London that you attach considerable importance to it. I'd be most interested to learn more . . ." Bultivant let the question hang unspoken.

So Mr. Midderley, with many references to the contents of his gleaming alligator-hide attaché case, told him in considerable, and appalling, detail.

"Wally?" Bultivant spoke into his telephone in guarded tones from his private office after Midderley had gone to his rooms to freshen up for dinner (Bultivant had thoughtfully selected the North Guest Suite so that the Great Man should be certain to hear, through Government House's ever-open windows, the sound of gunfire). "It's much worse than we imagined. He's planning a twelve-

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story hotel, with six hundred rooms, plus fifty guest cottages—" Bultivant heard the King's low whistle. "Wait," he went on, "there's more to it, much more. There'll be two swimming pools, a gambling casino, a sauna bath—"

"A sauna bath!" His Majesty interrupted in astonishment. "In this climate! Vyv, you've got to be kidding."

"The tourists will expect it. All Midderley International hotels have sauna baths, and this one will be no exception."

"But where will all these tourists come from?"

"He plans charter flights for tour groups. From Australia, New Zealand, Japan, from all over," Bultivant replied glumly. "A hell of a lot depends on your performance tomorrow, and I warn you, the man doesn't scare easily."

"Wait," said the King, and his tone was grim.

Following a miserable breakfast of cool porridge, preceded by an even worse cup of tea, a scowling Leonard Midderley set out with Bultivant for the royal audience in the black Humber limousine which was the Governor General's official transport.

"Quite safe to drive it in Cerula itself; it's just the countryside that's a trifle dicey," Bultivant began cheerfully as they passed through the gates of the Government House.

Midderley ignored the overture. "Bultivant," he said bluntly, "if I were in your shoes I'd shake up that bloody staff of yours until their back teeth rattled."

"Easier said than done, my dear fellow. I'm afraid the natives are rather an indolent lot, and highly sensitive. Rebuke them, and like as not they'll quit on the spot."

"Oh?" Midderley looked thoughtful. The putative Midderley Ceruliana would need one hell of a lot of staff. "That means I'll have to import Japs."

"Quite impossible, I'm afraid. Ceruliana for the Cerulianians, as the King phrases it. No, Japanese are definitely out of the question."

Midderley spent the rest of the brief drive to the Palace sulking in silence.

Bultivant barely repressed a gasp when he escorted Midderley into the royal presence. Walilolo IV had really done it up brown. He was sprawled obscenely on the royal throne, a fan-backed, rattan affair that tended to creak with age, clad only in his *taku-taku* which, along with the shell bracelets encircling his wrists and ankles, Bultivant recognized as treasures from the Royal Museum. The Governor General promptly prostrated himself.

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Midderley gasped in disbelief. "Dammit, sir!" he exploded, ignoring the royal presence. "You're an officer of the Crown!"

"Do as I do, for God's sake," Bultivant whispered fearfully.

Unwillingly and much against his better judgment Mr. Midderley sank slowly to his knees and then stretched his not inconsiderable bulk on the floor. There was absolute silence apart from the hotel tycoon's sterterous breathing.

"Uwana kula," His Majesty barked contemptuously.

Bultivant hauled himself to his feet and Midderley followed suit. So far, Bultivant thought, the charade was going precisely as planned.

"We will now speak in the English tongue," the King declared in the stilted language of a British missionary school. "Please to proceed. I trust your first night in our island was a pleasant one, Mr. Midderley?"

"I kept hearing rifle fire all night," the ex-Marine, who recognized rifle fire when he heard it, replied sullenly. The King's brows darkened.

"The northern savages, led by my accursed cousin, Prince Omeamunu. We have sworn to destroy each other, though it take the rest of our lives. I fear there may be years of fighting before he is overcome." Midderley's face fell. "But now to business," the King continued, dismissing his blood feud lightly.

It was a subdued, even hesitant Leonard Midderley who proceeded to outline his tentative project. He seemed to lack his customary enthusiasm.

"Most interesting," the King murmured at the conclusion of the presentation. He turned to Bultivant to conceal an irrepressible smile. "Mr. Midderley understands, of course, that after our independence and our nationalization program the kingdom would own seventy-five percent of his proposed hotel properties and profits."

"Independence! Nationalization! Seventy-five percent!" Mr. Midderley was not only dumfounded, he was outraged. He turned on Bultivant. "Why the bloody hell wasn't I told these things in London?"

"I'm afraid our information officers do tend to be somewhat lax in these matters," Her Majesty's Governor General replied ruefully. "Perhaps my reports were somehow overlooked. Perhaps you did not phrase your inquiries with sufficient clarity."

"On top of everything else, a civil war," Mr. Midderley continued bitterly. "Plus a labor force that won't work. It's just too damned much, Bultivant.

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I'm getting back to London as fast as I can. Can Government House radio Auckland and charter me a flight?"

"I think that can be arranged," Bultivant answered smoothly.

In this wise Mr. Leonard Midderley was enabled to depart from Ceruliana the following morning after spending the remainder of that wretched day in the sympathetic but less than cheering company of the Governor General, the miserable Anglican Bishop of Ceruliana, who greeted them at Government House with the dismal news that Prince Omeamunu's rebels had just sacked and burned the Mission School at Loamoa, and Captain fitz-ttench, who had seemingly been released from durance vile to enjoy what he made to appear one of the world's more monumental hangovers.

If possible, dinner was worse than lunch. As what Bultivant described as "a special treat, an old native dish," the Government House kitchen staff, exercising their combined ingenuity, had produced a turgid stew, on the surface of which floated objects that Mr. Midderley could not identify, nor wanted to. It tasted like a poor grade of fish glue. Mr. Midderley did not even touch his breakfast; there were bound to be emergency rations on his chartered aircraft, perhaps even a thermos of honest-to-God hot tea.

It was a splendid celebration that evening in Government House, and Chief Chef Lakani's roast pig had never been better. King Walilolo IV was back in his elegant Hong Kong dinner jacket, as was Prince Omeamunu, who had returned in cheery triumph from his rebellion. The Anglican Bishop was once more impeccable, and for the occasion Bultivant and Captain fitz-ttench had donned evening dress uniform, with decorations. The threat to Ceruliana's peace and serenity was gone away over the horizon.

"I'm rather glad we didn't have to bring up the virgin sacrifice and the roasted small boy," Walilolo IV said thoughtfully after they had risen for the Loyal Toast. "That might have been laying it on a bit thick, even for Midderley."

Bultivant raised his glass of finest Government House champagne (the kind *not* served at Government House receptions). "Gentlemen, I give you the Leonard Midderleys of the world. They keep us on our toes."

"Amen," said the Anglican Bishop of Ceruliana.

"Hear, hear," came the response.

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a **HERCULE POIROT detective story by**

AGATHA CHRISTIE

An early case in the career of Hercule Poirot—the mystery of the deadly poison. . .

"Murder is my business," said Poirot, "and it is my business before it has happened as well as afterward. . .

"One of the advantages, or disadvantages, of being a detective is that it brings you into contact with the criminal classes."

WASPS' NEST

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

Out of the house came John Harrison and stood a moment on the terrace looking out over the garden. He was a big man with a lean cadaverous face. His aspect was usually somewhat grim but when, as now, the rugged features softened into a smile, there was something very attractive about him.

John Harrison loved his garden, and it had never looked better than it did on this August evening, summery and languorous. The rambler roses were still beautiful; sweet peas scented the air.

A well-known creaking sound made Harrison turn his head sharply. Who was coming in through the garden gate? In another minute an expression of utter astonishment came over his face, for the dandified figure coming up the path was the last one he expected to see in this part of the world.

"By all that's wonderful," cried Harrison. "Monsieur Poirot!"

It was, indeed, the famous Hercule Poirot whose renown as a detective had spread over the whole world.

"Yes," he said, "it is I. You said to me once, 'If you are ever in this part of the world, come and see me.' I take you at your word. I arrive."

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"And I'm delighted," said Harrison heartily. "Sit down and have a drink."

With a hospitable hand he indicated a table on the veranda bearing assorted bottles.

"I thank you," said Poirot, sinking down into a basket chair. "You have, I suppose, no sirup? No, no, I thought not. A little plain soda water then—no whiskey." And he added in a feeling voice as the other placed the glass beside him, "Alas, my mustaches are limp. It is this heat!"

"And what brings you into this quiet spot?" asked Harrison as he dropped into another chair. "Pleasure?"

"No, *mon ami*, business."

"Business? In this out-of-the-way place?"

Poirot nodded gravely. "But yes, my friend, all crimes are not committed in crowds, you know?"

The other laughed. "I suppose that was rather an idiotic remark of mine. But what particular crime are you investigating down here, or is that a thing I mustn't ask?"

"You may ask," said the detective. "Indeed, I would prefer that you asked."

Harrison looked at him curiously. He sensed something a little unusual in the other's manner. "You are investigating a crime, you say?" he advanced rather hesitatingly. "A serious crime?"

"A crime of the most serious there is."

"You mean—"

"Murder."

So gravely did Hercule Poirot say the word that Harrison was quite taken aback. The detective was looking straight at him and again there was something so unusual in his glance that Harrison hardly knew how to proceed. At last he said, "But I have heard of no murder."

"No," said Poirot, "you would not have heard of it."

"Who has been murdered?"

"As yet," said Hercule Poirot, "nobody."

"What?"

"That is why I said you would not have heard of it. I am investigating a crime that has not yet taken place."

"But look here, that is nonsense."

"Not at all. If one can investigate a murder before it has happened, surely that is very much better than afterward. One might even—a little idea—prevent it."

Harrison stared at him. "You are not serious, Monsieur Poirot?"

"But yes, I am serious."

"You really believe that a murder is going to be committed here? Oh, it's absurd!"

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Hercule Poirot took no notice of the exclamation.

"Unless we can manage to prevent it. Yes, *mon ami*, that is what I mean."

"We?"

"I said we. I shall need your cooperation."

"Is that why you came here?"

Again Poirot looked at him, and again an indefinable something made Harrison uneasy.

"I came here, Monsieur Harrison, because I—well—I like you."

And then he added in an entirely different voice, "I see, Monsieur Harrison, that you have a wasps' nest there. You should destroy it."

The change of subject made Harrison frown in a puzzled way. He followed Poirot's glance and said in rather a bewildered voice, "As a matter of fact, I'm going to. Or rather young Langton is. You remember Claude Langton? He was at that same dinner where I met you. He's coming over this evening to take the nest. Rather fancies himself at the job."

"Ah!" said Poirot. "And how is he going to do it?"

"Petrol and the garden syringe. He's bringing his own syringe over; it's a more convenient size than mine."

"There is another way, is there not?" asked Poirot. "With cyanide of potassium?"

Harrison looked a little surprised. "Yes, but that's rather dangerous stuff. Always a bit of risk having it about the place."

Poirot nodded gravely. "Yes, it is deadly poison." He waited a moment, then repeated in a grave voice. "Deadly poison."

"Useful if you want to do away with your mother-in-law, eh?" said Harrison with a laugh.

But Hercule Poirot remained grave. "And you are quite sure, Monsieur Harrison, that it is with petrol that Monsieur Langton is going to destroy your wasps' nest?"

"Quite sure. Why?"

"I wondered. I was at the chemist's in Barchester this afternoon. For one of my purchases I had to sign the poison book. I saw the last entry. It was for cyanide of potassium and it was signed for by Claude Langton."

Harrison stared. "That's odd," he said. "Langton told me the other day that he'd never dream of using the stuff—in fact, he said it oughtn't to be sold for the purpose."

Poirot looked out over the roses. His voice was very quiet as he asked, "Do you like Langton?"

The other started. The question somehow seemed to find him quite unprepared.

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"I—I—well, I mean—of course, I like him. Why shouldn't I?"

"I only wondered," said Poirot placidly, "whether you did."

And as the other did not answer, he went on, "I also wondered if he liked you?"

"What are you getting at, Monsieur Poirot? There's something in your mind I can't fanthom."

"I am going to be very frank. You are engaged to be married, Monsieur Harrison. I know Miss Molly Deane. She is a very charming, a very beautiful girl. Before she was engaged to you, she was engaged to Claude Langton. She threw him over for you."

Harrison nodded.

"I do not ask what her reasons were; she may have been justified. But I tell you this, it is not too much to suppose that Langton has not forgotten or forgiven."

"You're wrong, Monsieur Poirot. I swear you're wrong. Langton's been a sportsman; he's taken things like a man. He's been amazingly decent to me—gone out of his way to be friendly."

"And that does not strike you as unusual? You use the word 'amazingly,' but you do not seem to be amazed."

"What do you mean, Monsieur Poirot?"

"I mean," said Poirot, and his voice had a new note in it, "that a man may conceal his hate till the proper time comes."

"Hate?" Harrison shook his head and laughed.

"The English are very stupid," said Poirot. "They think that they can deceive anyone but that no one can deceive them. The sportsman, the good fellow, never will they believe evil of him. And because they are brave, but stupid, sometimes they die when they need not die."

"You are warning me," said Harrison in a low voice. "I see it now—what has puzzled me all along. You are warning me against Claude Langton. You came here today to warn me."

Poirot nodded. Harrison sprang up suddenly. "But you are mad, Monsieur Poirot. This is England. Things don't happen like that here. Disappointed suitors don't go about stabbing people and poisoning them. And you're wrong about Langton. That chap wouldn't hurt a fly."

"The lives of flies are not my concern," said Poirot placidly. "And although you say Monsieur Langton would not take the life of one, yet you forget that he is even now preparing to take the lives of several hundred wasps."

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Harrison did not at once reply. The little detective in his turn sprang to his feet. He advanced to his friend and laid a hand on his shoulder. So agitated was he that he almost shook the big man, and, as he did so, he said, "Rouse yourself, my friend. And look—look where I am pointing. There on the bank, close by that tree root. See you, the wasps returning home, placid at the end of the day. In a little hour there will be destruction, and they know it not. There is no one to tell them. They have not, it seems, a Hercule Poirot. I tell you, Monsieur Harrison, I am down here on business. Murder is my business, and it is my business before it has happened as well as afterward. At what time does Monsieur Langton come to take this wasps' nest?"

"Langton would never—"

"At what time?"

"At nine o' clock. But I tell you, you're all wrong. Langton could never—"

"These English!" cried Poirot in a passion. He caught up his hat and stick and moved down the path, pausing to speak over his shoulder. "I do not stay to argue with you. I should only enrage myself. But you understand, I return at nine o' clock?"

Harrison opened his mouth to speak, but Poirot did not give him the chance. "I know what you would say: 'Langton would never,' et cetera. Ah, Langton would never! But all the same I return at nine o'clock. But, yes, it will amuse me—put it like that—it will amuse me to see the taking of a wasps' nest. Another of your English sports!"

He waited for no reply but passed rapidly down the path and out through the door that creaked. Once outside on the road, his pace slackened. His vivacity died down, his face became grave and troubled. Once he drew his watch from his pocket and consulted it. The hands pointed to ten minutes past eight.

"Over three quarters of an hour," he murmured. "I wonder if I should have waited."

His footsteps slackened; he almost seemed on the point of returning. Some vague foreboding seemed to assail him. He shook it off resolutely, however, and continued to walk in the direction of the village. But his face was still troubled, and once or twice he shook his head like a man only partly satisfied.

It was still some minutes of nine when he once more approached the garden door. It was a clear, still evening; hardly a breeze stirred the leaves. There was, perhaps, something

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a little sinister in the stillness, like the lull before a storm.

Poirot's footsteps quickened ever so slightly. He was suddenly alarmed—and uncertain. He feared he knew not what.

And at that moment the garden door opened and Claude Langton stepped quickly out into the road. He started when he saw Poirot.

"Oh—er—good evening."

"Good evening, Monsieur Langton. You are early."

Langton stared at him. "I don't know what you mean."

"You have taken the wasps' nest?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

"Oh!" said Poirot softly. "So you did not take the wasps' nest. What did you do then?"

"Oh, just sat and yarned a bit with Harrison. I really must hurry along, now, Monsieur Poirot. I'd no idea you were in this part of the world."

"I had business here, you see."

"Oh! Well, you'll find Harrison on the terrace. Sorry I can't stop."

He hurried away. Poirot looked after him. A nervous young fellow, good-looking but with a weak mouth.

"So I shall find Harrison on the terrace," murmured Poirot. "I wonder."

He went in through the garden door and up the path. Harrison was sitting in a chair by the table. He sat motionless and did not even turn his head as Poirot came up to him.

"Ah! *Mon ami*," said Poirot. "You are all right, eh?"

There was a long pause and then Harrison said in a queer, dazed voice, "What did you say?"

"I said—are you all right?"

"All right? Yes, I'm all right. Why not?"

"You feel no ill effects?"

"Ill effects? From what?"

"Washing soda."

Harrison roused himself suddenly. "Washing soda? What do you mean?"

Poirot made an apologetic gesture. "I infinitely regret the necessity, but I put some in your pocket."

"You put some in my pocket? What on earth for?"

Harrison stared at him. Poirot spoke quietly and impersonally like a lecturer coming down to the level of a small child.

"You see, one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of being a detective is that it brings you into contact with the criminal classes. And the criminal classes, they can teach you some very interesting and curious things. There was a pickpocket once—I interested

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myself in him because for once he has not done what they say he has done—and so I get him off. And because he is grateful he pays me in the only way he can think of—which is to show me the tricks of his trade.

"And so it happens that I can pick a man's pocket if I choose without his ever suspecting the fact. I lay one hand on his shoulder, I excite myself, and he feels nothing. But all the same I have managed to transfer what is in his pocket to my pocket and leave washing soda in its place.

"You see," continued Poirot dreamily, "if a right-handed man wants to get at some poison quickly to put in a glass, unobserved, he positively must keep it in his right-hand coat pocket; there is nowhere else. I knew it would be there."

He dropped his hand into his pocket and brought out a few white, lumpy crystals. "Exceedingly dangerous," he murmured, "to carry it like that—loose."

Calmly and without hurrying himself, he took from another pocket a wide-mouthed bottle. He slipped in the crystals, stepped to the table, and filled up the bottle with plain water. Then, carefully corking it, he shook it until all the crystals were dissolved. Harrison watched him as though fascinated.

Satisfied with his solution, Poirot stepped across to the nest. He uncorked the bottle, turned his head aside, and poured the solution into the wasps' nest; then he stood back a pace or two watching.

Some wasps that were returning alighted, quivered a little, and then lay still. Other wasps crawled out of the hole only to die. Poirot watched for a minute or two, nodded his head, and came back to the veranda.

"A quick death," he said. "A very quick death."

Harrison found his voice. "How much do you know?"

Poirot looked straight ahead. "As I told you, I saw Claude Langton's name in the book. What I did not tell you was that almost immediately afterward, I happened to meet him. He told me he had been buying cyanide of potassium at your request—to take a wasps' nest. That struck me as a little odd, my friend, because I remember that at the dinner of which you spoke, you held forth on the superior merits of petrol and denounced the buying of cyanide as dangerous and unnecessary."

"Go on."

"I knew something else. I had seen Claude Langton and Molly Deane together when they thought no one saw them.

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I do not know what lovers' quarrel it was that originally parted them and drove her into your arms. but I realized that misunderstandings were over and that Miss Deane was drifting back to her love."

"Go on."

"I knew something more, my friend. I was in Harley Street the other day and I saw you come out of a certain doctor's house. I know that doctor and for what disease one consults him, and I read the expression on your face. I have seen it only once or twice in my lifetime, but it is not easily mistaken. It was the face of a man under sentence of death. I am right, am I not?"

"Quite right. He gave me two months."

"You did not see me, my friend, for you had other things to think about. I saw something else on your face—the thing that I told you this afternoon men try to conceal. I saw hate there, my friend. You did not trouble to conceal it, because you thought there were none to observe."

"Go on," said Harrison.

"There is not much more to say. I came down here, saw Langton's name by accident in the poison book, met him, and came here to you. I laid traps for you. You denied having asked Langton to get cyanide, or rather you expressed surprise at his having done so. You were taken aback at first at my appearance, but presently you saw how well it would fit in and you encouraged my suspicions. I knew from Langton himself that he was coming at half-past eight. You told me nine o'clock, thinking I should come and find everything over. And so I knew everything."

"Why did you come?" cried Harrison. "If only you hadn't come!"

Poirot drew himself up. "I told you," he said, "murder is my business."

"Murder? Suicide, you mean."

"No." Poirot's voice rang out sharply and clearly. "I mean murder. Your death was to be quick and easy, but the death you planned for Langton was the worst death any man can die. He bought the poison; he comes to see you, and he is alone with you. You die suddenly, and the cyanide is found in your glass, and Claude Langton hangs. That was your plan."

Again Harrison moaned. "Why did you come? Why did you come?"

"I have told you, but there is another reason. I liked you. Listen, *mon ami*, you are a dying man; you have lost the girl you loved; but there is one

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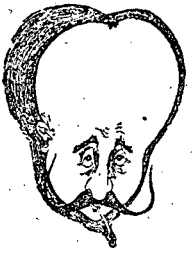
thing that you are not: you are not a murderer. Tell me now: are you glad or sorry that I came?"

There was a moment's pause and then Harrison drew himself up. There was a new dignity in his face—the look of a man who has conquered his baser self. He stretched out his hand across the table.

"Thank goodness you came," he cried. "Oh, thank goodness you came."



CRIMINALIMERICK

POIROT

By D. R. BENSEN

A dipping in feathers and tar—oh,
That or a flogging tomorrow
I'd vastly less fear,
If to crime I should veer,
Than pursuit and detection by Poirot.

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a *NEW* Inspector Seal story by

JOHN PIERCE

Do you like the unusual? Something different from anything else in this issue? In this issue! In ten years of issues!

Creighton Seal is retiring as Chief Inspector of Police. He is being given a testimonial banquet—which could easily turn out to be Inspector Seal's Last Case.

A wacky, wild, and wondrous tale, as clever as it is zany, and remarkably deductive and fair to the reader for so offbeat a story. And what an after-dinner speaker Seal proves to be! Sheer spellbinding rhetoric achieving grandiloquence! . . .

FAREWELL BANQUET

by JOHN PIERCE

At a meeting of the Gift Committee of the Boars Club this motion was made and seconded: That Creighton Seal, retiring Chief Inspector of Police, be shot through the head with a weapon while the band played at his farewell banquet.

Toade, Committee Chairman, thumped for order with his drinking glass on the cluttered table. The venue was the back room of a place of entertainment on the south side. Beyond the closed door topless girls jounced and jolted to a snaredrum and a warbling alto saxophone.

"Let's have some order here," Toade droned. "We're appointed by the Boars to select an appropriate gift to be given Inspector Seal at the Boars' testimonial dinner for him. No motion to kill him was recognized."

Indifference answered him. Toade studied them with new distaste—the dissolute, meaty faces, the shifty eyes, the bad dentures and vulgar jewelry. Petty chiselers all. He shuddered at being one of them.

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Like them he'd had his legal problems—he once owned Toade Cable Television; but he'd at least shown a little class.

"Suggestions?" he persisted.

"We just made it, Jim," said Shook, who wore black glasses night and day. "You wanted our ideas, we gave them."

"Seconded," said Bone.

Toade mulled it over. "This is a gift? Killing him?"

"A gift to us for a change," Ricketts said. "Everybody in this room, and one-fourth of the Boars' membership, we've been stomped on by that overgrown Boy Scout. Me, I got a living to make." Ricketts had been a chiropractor until Seal had a look at his diplomas.

"Your logic needs some airing," Toade said. "I'd assumed our problems were about over. We're all through with the silly jackass. He's retired. He's out of business. And to knock him off at this time—?"

The backlash of obscenity warmed him. He'd picked his gift committee well. Raucously they gave vent to their versions of the injustices Seal had done them. Shook's Ride-O-Rama and Freak Show had been chased from town—he now ran a carnival across the county line. Bone's Quality Meats included rodent hairs. Gropper's "Choice Residential Lots" were located in a swampland.

"Order, order," said Toade above the uproar.

"Come on," Bone said. "Seal's retirement is a hoax and so is this whole banquet idea, and everybody in Boars knows it. He's retired like Mae West at age thirty."

"He's not only not retired," flared Ricketts, "he's got that dead rich aunt's dough to operate with."

"And not the first sign of a control," said Shook. "No restraints. No D.A. or Police Chief to report to, no rules to follow."

Gropper said, "I say, Seal solving cases without authority, without even a private-eye license, that's as illegal as the stuff he investigates. Retired, my sinus headache! I say retire him good and proper. Get rid of the polo-playing bum."

Toade waited out the shouts of approval.

"*You* heard," he said calmly, "at the regular meeting tonight the purposes of the banquet. There are two—to publicize and emphasize the fact of his retirement and to try for some kind of rapport with the guy—"

"Bribe him, you mean," grumbled Ricketts. "Bribe Seal with a banquet? They all know he hates speeches. And you know all the big mouths in the Boars. And five Boars and five hack politicians will make

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thirty-minute speeches and by the time Seal staggers out of there he'll be after our guts till the day he dies."

"Hear hear!"

Strategically, yard by yard, Toade succumbed. Motion to kill Seal was re-entered and re-seconded. Four voted for, none against, Toade abstaining for policy reasons. Shook, whose background was as various as his collection of freaks, volunteered to make arrangements.

"Understand this now," he said. "The way this works is, once you turn it loose, boys, it's irreversible. My contact comes from somebody out in the boondocks that's got the word I want something done. He gives me a phone booth to call, somebody else I don't know that don't know me. *He* calls somebody *he* don't know, and so on—all nice and clean and no way to track it backwards or forwards. We drop off a few thousand somewhere, somebody picks it up, and the hit is on. They can't reach us, or us them, and there's no stopping it. Seal is a dead man."

They listened carefully. They gave him carte blanche and discussed money. They pledged total secrecy and adjourned to the front room where the topless ladies were. Toade had what he wanted. Somebody else to dispose of Inspector Creighton Seal.

"No, Fingers, no," said Seal to Aaron Hinschelman on their park bench. "Writing your term paper for you, that's taboo."

"Taboo?"

"Not allowed. Taboo: negative tribal magic. Look it up in that encyclopedia I gave you. It may be listed under t-a-b-u."

"And it means you won't."

"No, I'll help you, counsel you in any way, but write a term paper for your signature, that I can't."

Hinschelman, the reformed pickpocket, a small battered man, looked mournfully away. "But you got to. It takes all I can do just to understand Gulliver, much less write a paper."

Seal was silent. It was he who had reformed Fingers, had seen salvageability and a good mind, had found him employment and engineered his parole from Bagwell State Prison. It was he who had, during Hinsch's incarceration, taken him books not available in the inadequate prison library.

Subtlety had been needed. *Badmen of the West* was an early volume. Therein were shown Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, Doc Masterson, Belle Starr, and others in their true

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ignominy. Unfrocked in another edition were the likes of Al Capone, Dutch Schultz, Baby Face Nelson, and John Dillinger. The propagandizing done with, Hinschelman moved on to a correspondence course in basic English literature. A term paper on Gulliver among the Lilliputians was now required. Hinschelman had no experience at it. He had hoped Seal would write it for him. Seal demurred.

"So what if I fail the course and go back to picking pockets?" Hinschelman asked gloomily.

"There still are accommodations at Bagwell State," Seal smiled. "No, Aaron, you'll not find my heartstrings with that bow. Let's do this. We'll get together one evening and discuss Gulliver all you want. I'll try to indicate what's wanted in your paper. But the actual writing of it, that's up to you."

The clock at City Hall struck noon. Hinschelman sighed. "Gulliver among the Lilliputians. What a thing for a grown man to be doing. So okay, Mr. Egghead," he said, opening the book. "What do these mean? *Flimnap.* Some guy's name. *Tolgo phonac. Hekinah degul.* Foreign stuff he don't even translate. *Bolgolam. Reldresal.* Names. *Nardac,* they call Gulliver *Nardac,* these little guys do. What cute baloney is this Jonathan Swift guy trying to get across with these words?"

"He translates *Nardac.* Man Mountain. A title bestowed on him. The others aren't important at the moment. That's just Mr. Swift being frivolous as he describes life among these diminutives. They accept and host Gulliver until politics and petty intrigues come to a boil, then they decide to eliminate him as a threat. You'll find it not so tough after another reading."

"The paper's due in next Wednesday. When do we run off this study hall?"

"Not the next couple of nights, I'm afraid."

"Friday?"

Seal shook his head. "Friday night's my testimonial dinner."

"What testimonial dinner?"

"I'm being honored," Seal said modestly. "I'm to be guest of honor at a banquet being laid on by the Boars Club."

"That bunch of crooks? Honoring you? Are you kidding?"

"Your terminology is extreme. They do much good for the community now."

"And there's always a little bit of rakeoff. You've busted the balloons of about half the guys in there."

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"Again you exaggerate. Among every group in this age of affluence there's a bit of peculation."

Hinschelman spat. "The difference being, guys like me go to jail, they get a reprimand, or five years probated."

"I understand your outrage. I plan to fight these inequities, retired or not."

"And you think they don't know it?" Hinschelman gazed at the equestrian statue of General Ulysses S. Grant. "They're doing one of two things. They're trying to buy you off or bore you to death. They know you hate speeches. Hold on to your eardrums."

"Nothing is free, not even lunch let alone a banquet."

"Yeah, but I'd take along a taster to make sure there's no poison in your soup."

"We are out of the middle ages."

"Like Hitler and Stalin showed us. Look, Inspector, you wouldn't mind, would you, if I just kind of nosed around behind the scenes of that banquet, talked to a few guys that know people?"

"I most pointedly would. I'm being *honored*, Aaron. There are rumors our good Governor may be there, and certainly Mayor Haddock will, plus other local dignitaries. To run any kind of probe on such an act of kindness would be the height of ingratitude."

"So all right, it's your stomach. How about Saturday night for our thing on Gulliver?"

"Saturday night will be dandy."

Refreshments were served, buffooneries exchanged, and Bertrand Seip, Boars Club President, donned his tribal headpiece and climbed the podium. It was a special meeting to firm up, flesh out, finalize, and lock in arrangements for the banquet tomorrow night honoring Creighton Seal.

Boisterous huzzahs met Seip's first announcement. Not only Governor Trout had accepted their invitation; Fixe of the Senate would appear as well. The implications were obvious. Rumors were that the Governor would announce himself as a candidate for Fixe's Senate seat in the upcoming election. Success in this corner of the state was crucial. They'd be at the banquet, all right, each determined to outsit the other. Whether either had ever heard of Seal was unknown.

"But there'll be some disappointments among you," Seip went on. "We may get a congressman or two, and other big shots. And whereas, pre-

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viously, we were having some little trouble recruiting speakers from our membership to exalt the Inspector (laughter), we now find ourselves deluged with requests for speaking time (laughter). I know many of you would like to use this occasion to make mention of your own special projects for civic betterment (laughter) that might not otherwise reach the Gubernatorial or Senatorial ears. Still you understand there *are* limits."

He ran over the list of speakers. The Mayor. The President of Cashmere College. The Chairman of the Women's Study Club. The Superintendent of Schools. The District Attorney. The Chief of Police. A General of the National Guard. A representative of the United Fund. Seip as Boars President. Others to be named later. Plus the Governor and the Senator and—who was he leaving out?—yes, of course, Seal.

". . . and so you understand why we have to make strict limitations. And so, keeping in mind the Inspector's aversion to speeches, we've set an absolute maximum of seventeen on the number of speakers (groans and laughter)."

Tubbs of the Agenda Committee took the stand.

"We're getting out a menu and printed program. Dress is formal; for those of you without, we get a good rate at AAAAABAB Tuxedo Rental. Drinks served in the Arabian Room of the Regency, beginning at seven. At 7:30 Miss Rotary Drilling Rig presents the Inspector with some roses and leads him to his place at the speakers table and we all follow in. Though we might have to switch her over to the Governor and Senator. I doubt Seal likes flowers anyway. I guess we'll need two bunches.

"In addition to the talks we'll be entertained by a Miss Susu Sheribeshi, an internationally known violinist from Japan. That, I believe, ties in with our efforts to get an assembly plant for Yakamoki Transistor Products here in town; members of their trade commission will be our guests. I believe the Inspector likes Japanese violin music (laughter).

"I am *sure* he likes martial music—from his days as a Major in the Army—and in that vein we've arranged for a cadre from our Public Utilities Band—as many of them as we can fit in there—in new uniforms, to occupy a space behind the speakers' stand. They'll play during presentation of the Inspector's gift at the end of the program. Happy to say here that Mr. Hurdis, the band

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director, has composed a special march for the Inspector—I heard it, very stirring—*The Golden Seal.*"

From a thick limbo of horror rarefied by that celestial otherwhereness induced by his heavy-duty tranquilizer pills, Toade of the Gift Committee watched transfixed. Why me? asked his soul. Nobody had mentioned to him any Governor or Senator. At first rumors he'd gone scrambling across town after Shook: *Call it off!* Impossible, Shook told him. Everything had been done, the $5000 dropped and picked up. The contract was on, irrevocably.

"For the banquet?" Toade asked, terrified.

"Relax, Jim," Shook said from behind his black glasses. "They're professionals. It's the syndicate. They don't know who hired them. We're in the clear."

How would the kill happen? wondered Toade. Poison? Bomb? A sniper's round from a window across the street? Shook didn't know.

Committeemen rose and spoke and sat down and Toade succumbed to the pills' benefactions. I am not a bad fellow, he told himself. Had me a little Cable TV outfit—lots of documentaries, cultural stuff. Tried for the betterment of the community. Got me a little garden. Grow nice tomatoes and a little lettuce. Have a nice wife and try my best, have this little dog. So Seal got me on a technicality. I was trying to improve the quality of life, as they say.

Toade's Fleet was past history, as was Toade's Cable Television franchise. Toade's Fleet was, or had been, four closed vans packed to the walls with electronic jamming equipment. During World Series week he had developed them strategically about the city, cruising here, parking there, moving on, coming back, jamming all non-cable television signals until deranged viewers had come running, cash in hand, for subscriptions to Toade Cable Television. Not Seal. Seal smelled something and went nosing and broke it to the newspapers in huge headlines.

Town comic figure. Seip knew about it. Everybody did. Why stick him, Toade, with the Gift Committee? Because he didn't hate Seal more than anyone else in the club, probably. Or maybe Seip figured on it, what they'd planned. Well, here it went, Seal and the Boars Club with it. He took another pill. He heard his name called. ". . . Gift Committee."

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Toade rose. A mile high on tranquilizers, he spoke in a voice resonantly odd to him. "... the Inspector's wealthy aunt, as you know, left him everything a man could want. We put feelers out. We got his secret sentiments. Some gift of value to the community as a whole, the people he's tried to serve."

"And?" pressed Seip.

"Oh, it will benefit the community. Beyond that, fearing leakage, I won't go. But when the band plays, plays his special march, then I'll come walking up there in my full dress, you know, then we'd like it to be, or hope it comes as a surprise, and—"

What was he saying? he wondered.

More was here than met the palate, mused Seal. A scribbled note had been brought to him while the Mayor spoke. An uncallable phone number to call and a garbled message. Fingers had gone probing despite his remonstrances. The message foretold dire doings, somehow.

"... I am reminded of a passage from Epictetus," said President Stack of Cashmere College from the speakers' stand.

Seating arrangements had been torn askew by the advent of the Governor and the Senator. Two congressmen had appeared from nowhere, then an oil tycoon, a decorated P.O.W., and an astronaut. Thirty extra tables had been moved in to house the political eager beavers and the press, jamming the ballroom, halving each guest's share of edibles.

They had moved Seal to the far end of the celebrity table. He sat between Mrs. Murdock of the Study Club and a Baptist minister with a hacking cough. Behind the long table-of-honor guests posed the Public Utilities Band in bright new purple and gold uniforms, with their instruments gleaming and the tuba covered with a large taut circle of purple silk on which were the gold letters: GOOD LUCK INSPECTOR SEAL.

"... problems of inadequate college funding," pursued Stack, off on a new endowment drive.

Seal wagged his long legs and touched his token mustache. He eyed his program. It read like a political convention. Were he an ingrate he'd have made note of the total absence of his name from these early speeches. Thirteen more were ahead, excluding his own remarks, assuming they had not all died of malnourishment. A shrimp cocktail (two small shrimps) had followed the pledge of allegiance. Here came a half

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portion of clear soup. They hadn't planned on the hundred or so people in the political entourage and hadn't been able to requisition extra viands. He joined in the applause for the returning Stack. Someone else seized the microphone.

"... am reminded of the tale about the newcomer to town with business at the Second National Bank ..."

Banquets did jog the memory, reminding every speaker of some other place or of a stale joke or of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*. Who was speaking now? Seal didn't know. He harked to the prescience of Hinschelman. As usual, Hinsch was right. They'd talk him or starve him to death, or both, render him impotent in further prosecution of his retired hobby—peering beneath curious civic rocks. Dotting the audience like pink cauliflowers he saw faces that hated him, faces now enjoying his discomfort, willing themselves to endure this mile of bombast just to see him suffer, or (suggested Hinsch) die.

"... ask where the Second National Bank is? Buddy, I don't even know where the First one is!"

Laughter.

Old Civil War joke.

And what of Toade down there, squarely below him? Whence (pills aside) the origins of that sickly gleam in his eye, the wide smile when wishes for his, Seal's, longevity in retirement had been expressed? Not only Toade, but Ricketts, Bone, Gropper, and Shook in his poolhall black glasses, all of whom he'd sprayed out of dank corners once or twice. All seemed uncommonly blissful. What had these gentlemen in common?

He turned the program over. Ah, so. Gift Committee. They had opted, he believed, on his recommendation, to make a donation to some worthy "cause." Gift, he now read, to be presented way, way down here past midnight, or maybe at dawn, while the purple band behind them played *The Golden Seal*.

"... our democratic heritage as free people ..."

He turned to the telephone message. A waiter had brought it. It read: *Call 612-1818 reference the Andrac Tabu.*

It made no sense. There was no 612 exchange. There was a 512, a 312, but no 612. Obviously he couldn't call it even if he were free. And obviously Hinschelman knew he couldn't.

New applause shook him and he saw the crowd on its feet. He stood with the others as Senator Fixe, a bountiful figure

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with sprawling wide face and loose flabby mouth flashing silver, stood to speak. Fixe spent half of his life on committees investigating other people. It made one wonder.

Yes, there, he mused, barely listening, was a gaudy combination. If Governor Trout had, as was said, the franchise on the jeweled cookie jar, then Fixe had the raisin concession. Trout getting interested in raisins? And here was the whole civic apparatus and all the young aspirants come to wheedle, to be seen, to ask for jobs, for money, for a seat on that spangled bandwagon.

Andrac Tabu? It meant nothing to Seal. It did mean Hinschelman, for whom he'd spelled out "tabu" in that form. So then what was his old friend Fingers saying. *What* was tabu? And what was Andrac?

"... innocent women and children!" the Senator cried.

Why were women and children always innocent? Had he dozed? Let him not—not at his own testimonial dinner—with a threat of dirty doings in the air. Who was *this* speaking? Not Fixe? No, it wasn't Fixe. It was Thigpen urging a freeway through the zoo and return of those poor trapped animals to freedom, or to another zoo (Thigpen owned a little acreage adjoining the zoo).

Seal had slept through Fixe. He looked out. He wasn't alone. Almost audible from the audience were the quiet snores, the groans at the talks' duration, and the growls of cheated stomachs. Ten dollars a plate, he had heard.

"... our brothers and sisters in Somaliland ..."

"... reminded of a line from that great American poet, Edgar A. Guest ..."

Wasn't Guest a Canadian? Or was that Robert W. Service?

"... Franklin Delano Roosevelt ..."

Applause.

Call 612-1818, reference the Andrac Tabu. The message was in code, he surmised. Rightly so. Let the wrong party take an uncoded call from Hinsch, or be given it to deliver to him, and the message would have stopped in some hostile pocket. He closed his eyes. Andrac.

Had he dozed again? He must have. This was an inhuman voice, almost furry-cuddly-animal-like in its muted sorrow. No, not a voice at all but a violin under savage attack by a pretty Japanese lady in flowered robes. *Thy Tiny Hand Is Frozen*, read the program. From *La Boheme*, wasn't it? Four speeches were left. Beneath the violin's sob his stomach shouted. Short of steak, they'd substituted fried

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corned beef hash. Guess what he'd been served.

"... meaningfully viable alternative to our ecological dilemma ..."

He'd been reading Gulliver. They had voted to starve Gulliver down before axing him, lessening the disposal problem. "... neither then would the stench of your carcass be then so dangerous, when it should become more than half diminished ..."

New applause, standing ovation number 4-B, the Governor. Seal knew him well. That is, knew all he wanted to know. Sunlamp-tanned, flowing silver hair in the kiddie mode, the smile and the charm that unhinged old ladies.

"... a vote for Amurica ..."

Call 612-1818. Intolerable, this. Incredible, his testimonial dinner. Three hours of sales pitches. A Mall-O-Rama shopping center on the site of the underprivileged children's swimming pool (reports were of "several near drownings and polluted water"). A bid for a professional sports franchise. Expansion of the school system. More pay for teachers. Incursions of Yankee unions. And the Governor, what was he up to?

"... mentality of the police state."

Of course, yes, the Governor knew his audience and their chafing under the restrictions of the law. Seal yawned. He dozed. He woke to applause, slept and woke. All heads were turned to him, Seip stood behind him, nudging his arm. It was past midnight.

He stood to lukewarm applause and walked behind the line of politicos in front of the band and found the microphone. Some audience they'd left him. Two hundred faces slack with torpor, four hundred hooded eyes. So be it, he'd play their game. He had dined atrociously but slept well. He was fresh and ready.

"... everything humanly sayable having been said (muted laughter) and I having nothing, I must improvise," Seal remarked. "I am reminded of a note delivered me at the banquet table here some hours earlier. It may have to do with criminalities. Some of you have expressed interest in the crime-fighting mystique, the deliberative processes entailed. Assuming what I have here does suggest unauthorized activities, we might try, for our late evening—or early morning—amusement, to make sense of this message, you and I.

"*Call 612-1818, reference the Andrac Tabu,* reads this message. Strange message, isn't it? Bollixed up in the trans-

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mission? Possibly. But then it's all we have to go on, isn't it? Forget for now the phone number. It is either bogus or mistakenly transcribed, and there's not much we can do about that. How do we know this? Because there is no 612 exchange here in town.

"So, having no number to call, we pass on to the message proper. Here is where suspicion of a joke enters in. You see me before you, a humble retired policeman in a modest American city. Why should I, I ask myself, be chosen to receive this message delivered in such unorthodox fashion? Who am I to have been summoned in the interests of an artifact as rare, as valuable, as old, as prized and as sought after as the legendary Andrac Tabu?

"And most rare it is, ladies and gentlemen. Come back with me into the predawn of recorded history. Legend tells us there was, in Celebes, a jungle tribe passing under the name of Andrac, or Onjok, or sometimes Onjeki. Notorious hunters, fearless warriors. We beg their leave to put our craft through the coral reefs. We pass their outposts and work our way through the forests of rattan and bamboo and tamarind, circle mountains and waterfalls and come to the throne of a native chieftain.

"There beside him rests this priceless piece of statuary done in emeralds and onyx—some say rubies and diamonds—the personification of the unwritten tabu governing the life pattern of this simple tribe."

He paused. In that audience of bleary eyes, of heads nodding over empty plates, he saw boredom of such vastness as would jell the tallest heaven and cover over Texas with thirty yards of concrete. But I did not do this, gentlemen, he silently apologized; this was to have been my party. Nor could you even feed me decently before laying my long neck on the block.

"Do I see some of you nodding? Hear a decorous snore? Perhaps it is the spelling of t-a-b-u that confuses you. It is but the original of our own t-a-b-o-o. The word, meaning literally, 'marked off,' or 'not to be lightly approached,' is of Polynesian origin, and has been known also to appear as *tapu*, *kapu*, or *tambu*, or even, in some parts of Rhodesia, *tonda*.

"It is simply, for the purposes of that brevity to which we have dedicated ourselves tonight, a 'negative application of magic.' Positive magic says 'do this,' whereas the tabu says, 'do not do this,' lest supernatural penalties be incurred. Or it is, in the words

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of our more imaginative show-biz entertainers, a 'no-no.'"

He paused again. He poured a glass of water. At his elbow the fine majestic head of the Governor nodded, snapped up, dipped and rose like the prow of a mighty sailing vessel.

"Consequently we learn of strange customs, if I may be permitted to borrow from the eminent scholar, Sir James George Frazer. A soldier in Madagascar, or parts thereof, may not dine on the knee of an ox, lest, like the ox, he become weak in the knees and unable to march. Thus, ox knees are tabu in Madagascar.

"Or take a curious custom of the Urewera in New Zealand. There visitors are apt to conceal their spittle lest this substance be taken from them and used to work magic against them.

"Or consider the Tolampoos of Celebes. Their belief is if you write a man's name down you can carry off his soul along with it. So writing of a man's name is tabu. Then turn to certain tribes, among them the Zafimanelo of Madagascar, who believe eating and drinking very dangerous in that their souls might escape their mouths. So they close windows and doors before dining."

He saw what was going on out there. Far in the rear two banqueters had slipped furtively off their chairs and stooped and circled until they'd located free floor space where they lay down full length to sleep. Fixe wouldn't leave. Trout wouldn't leave. Nor would anybody.

"Interesting, these tabus? I find them very. Let's pursue further." He smiled. He sipped water. He smiled again. And here he reared back and suddenly hurled himself headlong and unprotected into a terrible, clutching forest replete with the most arcane of backwoods customs, emptying out his small stock of Frazer, calling on his National Geographic uncle's experiences, then improvising his own on the spot.

He spoke of the Flamen Dialis, the Alfoors of Poso, the Motumoto and the Papuans of Finsch Haven, the Nufoors of Dutch New Guinea, and the Samoyeds, the Todas, the Tauregs of the Sahara, the Ainos of Japan and the Akamba and Nandi of Eastern Africa. Wood gods and water gods. The Huzuls of Carpathia, the Wagogos of East Africa, the Moxos Indians of Bolivia. The Yukis of California, Caribs of the Orinoco, Chams of Cochin China, Bagandas of Malay. The Galelareese. Ruthenians. Bechuanas. Caffres of Sofala, the Basutos and the Murring, Raratongans and Ponapeans.

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He discussed tabus against adultery, against washing the hair while the husband hunted, against hunting by moonlight, against showing the face, quitting the house, saying personal names, against knots and rings, intercourse with strangers, against drinking green sarzaki, against not drinking green sarzaki, against not drinking green sarzaki from a broken cup or while hunting the Margonian rizdak unless a blowgun blessed by konjak grease be used. He discussed the Sultan of Wadai, the Mosynoeci of the Pontus, Tinguianes of the Philippines, Kings of Onitsha and Sabaea.

Heads fell into plates, snores cut the air like motorcycles on the Mojave, glasses toppled, rolled, and broke on the floor. He went on to South Slavonians, the Ruhlans, Tongans and Masai and Incas and Sioux.

"Is this, you ask, final, this curse of the tabu? By this I mean to say, does infraction bring irrevocable punishment? Fortunately not always. Among more advanced tribes we find what we might term antidotal tabus, or tabu medicine, or jik-jik, whereby the tabu penality is alleviated or withdrawn.

"I am reminded of the Xobzali tribe where the drying of kongoni meat on the limb of a cedar tree is tabu. Is there release for the transgressor? Fortunately yes. His younger brother is seized and suspended by an ankle from a vine hanging from a high limb. All tribesmen gather and, as the youth is spun, head down, rapidly about, they dance about him to a gourdbeat, coming to rest on each seventh step when they shout: *Mimba-zak-mimba-oologo, where flies the pretty chicken?* This continues until dawn, when the magic of the tabu is lifted.

"Similarly, in the case of the Bonjocan of Gonkoni, the eater of the forbidden Muji fruit makes penance by wrapping his head in fresh kuba leaves and standing, storklike, on one leg throughout."

A thunderous crash shook the room. He had seen it coming, had seen Fixe sway on his chair, to and fro, side to side. Now Fixe toppled to the floor asleep, bringing tablecloth and dishes atop him. He helped four others restore the sleeping Senator. Was Seal carrying this thing too far? Small consideration when weighed against their upcoming plans for him—the dislodgement of his brains from their native habitat between his ears.

"So much for tabus and their antidotes. We're clearly on the wrong track anyway. We've

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noted that the Andrac Tabu is only legend, and what can be done with legend when I've no telephone number to call, even should I decide to accept the case. A new approach might be needed.

"So while listening to our distinguished speakers, I began playing around with transpositions of the letters in 'andrac.' 'Canard' springs to mind. Canard, meaning hoax, from the French *vendre un canard a moitie*—to half-sell a duck; to pretend, sell, or cheat. Hoax? Nothing's a hoax until we've thoroughly checked it out. Does 'duck' have meaning for us? I do not see it on the menu. Something I should duck from? No, all speeches are ended, as will mine very quickly. Consider the French word *canarder*—to fire at. Fire at what? Fire at a testimonial banquet? Foolish thought."

He passed his eyes over Toade and the Gift Committee. They alone in that slumbrous hall remained upright and alert. His last sally had tensed them, brought clandestine smiles, a quick exchange of glances. Narrowing things a bit.

"No, canard makes no sense. Discard it with andrac. Leaving us with but one other letter combination that forms a recognizable word. This word is Nardac. Unfamiliar? Think back to your childhood reading, to *Gulliver's Travels*. Nardac, signifying Man Mountain, was the title bestowed on Gulliver when that worthy was cast up on the island of the Lilliputians, that race of diminutives who came in time to plot his extinction."

He went to the water pitcher. "My contribution tonight nears its end. Before it does I would like to thank you for the tribute you've paid me. You have seen my farewell remarks on television. To repeat them would be tiresome."

Behind him he heard activity. The band, sensing its moment, had come awake. Instruments were being picked up, sheets of music selected. He turned his back on the audience to journey among the purple uniforms and gold braid.

"And I've gone far too long without thanking these kind and talented musicians who gave up their evening and went without sustenance to play for me. I know many of these gentlemen from old."

He walked among the trumpeters, the trombones, the drums and reed instruments. He shook the director, Hurdis, by the hand. He wandered on, coming to a stop beside a hulking, morose gentleman busy shouldering the tuba.

"And here is my old friend Mooney. We have had our little

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differences through the years, Mooney and I, but he's paid his debt to society, as we say, and bears me, I hope, no animosity."

From the side he considered the taut circle of purple silk stretched across the horn's outlet, the golden message: GOOD LUCK INSPECTOR SEAL.

"Most touching," he said. "Tuba. What about the word tuba gives me pause? Where were we? Yes. Nardac. Nardac among the diminutives. But Gulliver, you recall, at home in England, was of perfectly normal size. Only among the tiny people of Lilliput was he considered a giant, or Nardac. There they decided to kill him. Does Nardac in my telephone message refer to me? If so, I am a giant only in relation to someone very much smaller. Am I being asked to look for someone very small in our ballroom?

"I see no such figure. Under a table? I suspect someone would have kicked him in his sleep by this time, or spilled water on him. But here is a tuba which, now that I study it, is but an anagram of tabu. Odd indeed.

"In fact, total gibberish, I'd think. But we are, for the moment, policemen. We grab at any lead, any clue, however bizarre. And like the natives we have our own form of antidotes against tabu."

He reached into his jacket pocket, withdrew a penknife and a flat cannister.

"In my case it is a spray mixture concocted in our local police department and up for patent, but thought by some to be a bit more effective than is needed for the average transgressor of the law. It is a form of mace fortified with a nauseant fortified further by—I hope not to the discomfort of Mooney—a strong emetic. Let us see."

Standing to the side of the tuba, Seal cut a rent in the purple silk. He put the spray device to the aperture and pressed its valve. With the hiss of spray came an earsplitting scream from within the instrument, hacking coughs, howls of rage. "Cut that out!"

"Astounding!" Seal gasped in feigned surprise, facing the startled, waking audience. "Someone in Mooney's tuba? Another jet of tabu antidote, perhaps?"

"Don't you do that," shrieked the falsetto voice. "Let me out of here. I'll talk, I'll spill everything!"

Seal tore the silk away. He reached inside the horn of the tuba and withdrew a sick, coughing, spitting, writhing

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midget. In the midget's hand was a small hand pistol. On its muzzle was a silencing device.

Behind him in the wakened hall he heard bedlam.

"I thought sure if I saved your life you'd write my paper," Hinschelman said.

It was Saturday morning in the park. Albert Claxton, Seal's friend and golfing partner, who had attended last night's banquet, had joined Seal and the pickpocket.

"No can do, Hinsch," Seal said. "I thank you but I can't cheat you through a course."

"That's gratitude."

"You'll thank me in time."

"I wish someone would straighten me out for a change," Claxton said. "I heard Hinsch say he'd pried the story loose from the midget's disgruntled girl friend, and I understand the andrac-nardac and the tabu-tuba, and Hinsch's reasons for using code. He was saying, in effect, that someone much smaller than you was primed to kill you. But I don't see what led you to those transpositions, or in which direction you should look."

"Very simple," Seal said. "The phone number."

"What?"

"Dead man's hand."

"Never heard of it."

"And you a card player?" Seal said. "In some of our earlier, pre-Gulliverian reading we covered, Hinsch and I, the death of Wild Bill Hickok. Wild Bill was shot and killed from behind in Deadwood City by a Mr. Jack McCall while seated at a poker table. His poker hand, says one story, was preserved for posterity by a Mr. Christy. In the hand were two black aces, two black eights, and the queen of hearts. Aces and eights are now known as a dead man's hand.

"Notice the phone number: 612-1818. Discard the 6, since it wasn't callable, and you have 12, the numerical equivalent of a queen, then two ones, or aces, and two eights. Someone, says the number, is set to shoot you from behind. Which of thirty some-odd bandsmen? is my first reaction. But, then, Nardac tells me Lilliputian, a small person, and the tuba says where he is, this being the sole niche to the rear of me where such a small customer could have curled himself unseen and hoped to get out of there unnoticed."

"And you invented all that about the andrac tabu and rubbed their noses through another half hour of talk," Hinschelman said admiringly.

"Another full hour," said Claxton, yawning.

"And they nailed Toade and the Gift Committee?"

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"Unfortunately no, thanks to Shook. Among thieves, dishonor. Shook couldn't resist pocketing the $5000 earmarked for professional people—even assuming he knew of any. Why not do the job himself with a midget out of his own carnival show. And Mooney, the tuba player, works cheap. A plausible enough plan, had it worked. The band plays, I fall dead, the band hustles out in the confusion, the midget and all evidence disappears. Toade and the rest of them deny any knowledge of it. It's four against one."

"Sitting through those speeches was a year in jail," Claxton reflected. He pondered further. "Bit of a risk, I'd think, dozing and doodling along under the assumption he'd wait half the night for the precise musical moment. He had concealment. He had a silencer and bursts of applause to muffle that. Must have gone half mad, crammed in there."

"You forget the niceties of protocol."

"Meaning?"

"Because of Trout and Fixe and their hangers-on I was exiled to the Siberian end of the honor table, far over against the wall."

"But still eminently shootable."

"Not so," Seal said. "The tuba wasn't pointed at me."

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One part O. Henry, a dash of de Maupassant, and three parts the Great Russian Master . . .

VENGEANCE

by ANTON CHEKHOV

Lyev Savvitch Turmanov, a worthy citizen who possessed a nice little fortune, a nice little wife, and a nice little bald spot on his head, was celebrating the birthday of one of his friends with a game of cards. After a strenuous effort which covered his forehead with perspiration, he suddenly recollected that he and the bottle had been strangers for quite a long time.

He rose and, balancing himself on his tiptoes between the tables, went into the guest room where the youngsters were dancing. Here he smiled graciously and with a fatherly caress he patted the shoulders of a young skinny druggist, then slipped through a little door which led into the dining room. On a little round table in this room stood bottles and glasses with whiskey. Among other refreshments he spied a plate containing half a herring decorated with parsley.

Lyev Savvitch filled a glass, made a gesture as though about to deliver a speech, emptied the glass, and made a wry face. Then he jabbed the herring with the fork and—but suddenly he overheard voices behind the wall.

"Very well," spoke a woman's voice, "but when?"

"My wife," said Lyev Savvitch to himself, recognizing the voice. "I wonder whom she is talking to?"

"Whenever you desire," replied a deep and heavy bass. "Today it is not convenient, tomorrow I shall be busy the whole day—"

"This is Dentjarev," thought Lyev, recognizing the bass voice of his friend. "Et tu, Brute! And so she has caught you, too, in her net? By Jove, nothing seems to satisfy her. I've never seen such a restless woman in my life! Not a single day can she live through without her little romance!"

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"Yes, tomorrow I shall be busy," continued the heavy bass. "What do you say to writing me a little note? That will give me great pleasure. But we must introduce some system into our correspondence. Let's see if we can't find some way. It isn't a bit safe to send our letters through the mail. Your turkey is liable to intercept our correspondence in that way. And when you write to me, my wife might sometimes open the letter in my absence, and then! . . ."

"What shall we do, then?" asked Lyev's wife.

"We've got to find some way. It won't do to send them through a servant, for your lobster of a husband is surely watching the servants. I wonder whether he's still at that game of cards?"

"Yes, and he always loses, too, the big fool!"

"He must be lucky in love, then," laughed Dentjarev. "Now, listen, my little girlie. I've hit on a plan. On my way from the office tomorrow at six o'clock I pass by the Public Garden where I am to meet the Inspector. And so, sweetheart, I want you to manage just a little before six, but no later, to place a note for me in the marble vase that stands to the left of the grapevine arbor. Do you know the place I mean?"

"Of course I do," said Lyev's wife.

"That will be poetical and mysterious. And in this way neither your wooden-headed meal ticket nor my old shrew will know anything about it. Do you understand?"

Lyev Savvitch emptied another glass and returned to the game. The discovery which he had just made did not surprise him; it did not even arouse his jealousy or anger. He had long outgrown the habit of scolding and fuming and raging and even occasionally beating his wife for her misbehavior. He had long ago given up all hope and nowadays he merely looked through his fingers at his wife's romantic vagaries. And yet he was now feeling uncomfortable. His pride and self-love were touched to the quick at such appellations as "fool," "lobster," and "wooden-headed meal ticket."

"Ye gods, what a blackguard this Dentjarev is!" he thought as he marked down his score. "When he meets me in the street he pretends to be a good friend, grinning and patting me in the belly; and yet see what he can do behind my back. When he speaks to me man to man, I'm his friend, and when he talks behind my back, lo and behold, I'm a fool and a lobster!"

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And the more he lost at the game, the more indignant he felt.

"Why, his mother's milk is still wet on his lips," he thought, crushing in his rage the piece of chalk which he held. "He's nothing but a little snipe. If it were not for the fact that I wouldn't condescend to slap his face, I'd show him what a wooden-headed meal ticket can do!"

At supper he was unable to look Dentjarev straight in the face, although the latter seemed as if on purpose determined to annoy him with his questions. Had he won or lost? Why was he so sad?—and so forth. He even had the nerve to scold Lyev's wife for not being sufficiently careful of her husband's health.

And Lyev's wife, as though nothing had happened, looked at her husband with dove's eyes, chatting so innocently and laughing so genuinely that the devil himself could not have accused her of infidelity.

And when he came home Lyev Savvitch felt angry and dissatisfied, as though he had eaten old rubbers instead of veal for supper. He might have made an effort to forget the whole incident were it not for his wife's laughter and prattle which reminded him every minute of the fool, the lobster, the wooden-headed meal ticket.

"I should have punched him in the jaw, that lowlife," he thought. "Right in front of everybody . . ."

And he pictured to himself how nice it would be to thrash Dentjarev, or to challenge him and shoot him like a bird . . . It wouldn't be a bad idea to make him lose his job. Or perhaps it would be best to put some disgusting object into the marble vase, something with a nasty smell—a dead rat for instance . . . Perhaps he might intercept his wife's letter and put in its place a silly poem signed "Your Akulyka," or something else of that sort.

For a long time he paced through his bedroom cooling his rage with these reveries. Suddenly he stopped and slapped his forehead.

"Hooray, I've got it!" he exclaimed, beaming with joy. "This is a wonderful idea! Excellent!"

When his wife fell asleep he sat down near the table and after long deliberation, disguising his handwriting and purposely committing a number of errors, he penned the following:

To the Merchant Dulinov

Dear Sir:

If up to six oclock dis evenin, the twelvth of September, you fale to put

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two hundred dollars inter the marble vaze wich is situaited in the Public Garden, just to the left of the graipvine arber, you will be a dead man and your drygudes store will be blown up."

And Lyev Savvitch jumped up enthusiastically.

"Isn't this a wonderful plan?" he growled, rubbing his hands together. "Immense, even if I say so myself! Beelzebub himself couldn't have hit on a happier idea! It is quite certain that the storekeeper Dulinov will get so scared that he will immediately notify the police. And they will surely send a number of detectives who will hide themselves among the bushes and watch. At six o'clock, when Dentjarev comes for his letter, they will nab the poor fool—and by Jove, won't he get pepper to smell! He'll be scared blue, and before everything is cleared up, the rascal will get a good chance to cool his amorous ardor in jail. And it will serve him right too. Bravo, Lyev Savvitch!"

He put a stamp on the envelope and going downstairs deposited it himself in the letter box.

He fell asleep with a radiant smile playing on his lips. For many a long night had he not slept so sweetly and so soundly.

When he awoke in the morning and recalled his plan he felt so happy that he actually began to purr and even went so far as to flirt with his faithless wife.

On his way to work and later, while sitting in his office, he kept smiling to himself as he pictured Dentjarev's terror on finding himself caught in the trap.

Toward six o'clock he could restrain himself no longer and ran to the Public Garden in order to witness with his own eyes the downfall of his enemy.

"Aha!" he thought, seeing a policeman in the vicinity.

Arriving at the arbor he sat down behind a tree and, fixing his sharp stern eyes on the vase, awaited the arrival of Dentjarev. He sat as if on pins and needles in his impatience.

Precisely at six Dentjarev appeared. The young man was evidently in a very good humor. His silk hat encircled his head at a coquettish angle, and through his unbuttoned coat his very soul seemed to glitter together with his vest. He was smoking a cigar and whistling a merry tune.

"Now, you big slob, I'll show you who is a lobster and a wooden-headed meal ticket!" chuckled Turmanov. "You just wait!"

Dentjarev approached the

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vase and languidly put his hand into it. Lyev Savvitch half rose and fixed his eyes on him. The young man took a tiny package out of the vase, carefully examined it on all sides, and shrugged. Then he undid the package, shrugged again, and opened his mouth in astonishment.

The package contained two brand-new $100 bills.

Dentjarev looked long at these bills. Finally, shrugging once more, he put them into his pocket and said, "Many thanks!"

Poor Lyev Savvitch heard these words "many thanks." That entire evening he stood opposite Dulinov's dry-goods store, shook his fist at the sign, and raged, "You coward! You soul of a penny storekeeper! Pinhead! You pot-bellied rabbit you!"

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THE MISCHIEF DONE

by EDMUND CRISPIN

"People are superstitious about diamonds," said Detective Inspector Humbleby. "They believe all sorts of extraordinary things. And of course diamonds do give us a lot of trouble at the Yard, one way and another."

" 'O Diamond! Diamond!' " his host said.

"Is that a quotation? No, no, don't bother, leave it. Among the many delusions people have about diamonds—"

" 'O Diamond! Diamond! Thou little knowest the mis-

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chief done!'" Out of the depths of the armchair in his rooms in St. Christopher's, Gervase Fen, University Professor of English Language and Literature, reached across with the decanter to pour more sherry into his guest's glass. "Allegedly said by Isaac Newton," he explained. "His dog Diamond knocked over a candle and incinerated 'the almost finished labours of some years.'"

"Mathematicians oughtn't to keep dogs," said Humbleby. "And historians oughtn't to lend their manuscripts to John Stuart Mill." He presumably meant Carlyle, part of whose *French Revolution* was used as kindling by Mill's housemaid. "Rubies are more valuable than diamonds," Humbleby obstinately went on. "And contrary to popular supposition, diamonds are very brittle. You can lose hundreds of pounds by just dropping one on a carpet."

"Humbleby, what is all this about?"

And Humbleby, deflating, sighed. "I've been made a fool of," he said. "Somebody went and stole an enormous great valuable diamond literally from under my nose, when I was supposed to be protecting it."

"That's bad."

"Not that the owner's lost it, mind."

"That's good."

"He's just hidden it somewhere, or rather, his brother has. The whole thing's an insurance fraud," said Humbleby aggrievedly. "We know it's that, but unfortunately we can't begin to prove it. And I don't enjoy being made a fool of."

"No one does."

"I should like somehow to get a bit of my own back."

"Naturally, naturally."

"So can you help me, do you think?"

"I very much doubt it," said Fen. "But tell me what happened, and I'll try."

"The diamond's owner," said Humbleby, "was—and if I'm right about the business, still effectually is—a Soho jeweler called Asa Braham. Years ago he had a robbery, a genuine one, and I was put in charge of the investigation, and it went on for rather a long time, so I got to know Asa quite well. He's a wiry little man with frizzy black hair, fiftyish, very lively, very active; a charmer, and sharp-witted with it. I never exactly trusted him, but I did get to like him—and that was why I stupidly allowed myself to get involved in this business of the *Reine des Odalisques*."

"Who on earth is she?"

"That's what the diamond is

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called. Its first owner, who christened it, was a Frenchman —apparently," said Humbleby waspishly, "a man of very little judgment, taste, or even ordinary good sense. Anyway, it was from him that Asa Braham bought the thing, about six weeks ago now, for well over a hundred thousand pounds."

"Good grief."

"Yes, it was a lot, but although it was only mined quite recently it's become one of the famous diamonds. And Asa wanted it like mad, though he couldn't really afford it. You see, he's one of those jewelers who get obsessed with stones for their own sake, not at all a good thing from the commercial point of view—and in fact, Asa, though he's done adequately well, has never really flourished; but I suppose it has its satisfactions, even if I can't begin to imagine them myself.

"Asa passionately wanted that diamond; he *had* to have it; and he mortgaged himself to the hilt to pay the price. God alone knows what, apart from crime, he expected to do next. There he was with the *Reine*, doting on it, and nothing, psychologically, would have suited him better than to spend hours staring at the wretched bauble every day for the rest of his natural life.

"Yet if he'd actually settled down to that, he'd have been made bankrupt in a year or less. What I mean is, he just couldn't *afford* to keep the thing. Considered simply as a buy, the whole transaction was crazy; it isn't at all easy to dispose of hugely valuable stones even for what they cost, let alone at a profit; you may have to wait for years."

"Fairly clear so far," said Fen. "You seem to have deviated, though. What about this earlier robbery? Genuine, you say?"

"Oh, yes, definitely. We got the villains eventually and put them away. Also we got back some of the stones. On the rest, the insurance company paid—reluctantly."

"Yes, they're always reluctant."

"In this case they were specially so. They didn't think Asa's precautions were good enough. But, God, jewelers," said Humbleby with some feeling. "I'll tell you what jewelers do: they roam about in dark alleys, at dead of night, with small fortunes rattling loose in their waistcoat pockets .... For the stones Asa didn't recover, as I said, the company paid. But the word went round that he was slack, and after that his insurance was much stiffer, not just in terms of premiums but in terms of security too.

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"So—he bought the *Reine*, and naturally he insured it, but there were a great many specific conditions. I've seen that policy—after the theft of the *Reine*, of course, I was working with the insurance company—and it's very tightly drawn indeed, as regards how the stone was to be looked after.

"So there you have it: the diamond bought about six weeks ago, and first carefully stowed away in the vault of Asa's shop, and then when four weeks ago Asa had to go off to Brazil on business it was transferred to the safe-deposit vault at Pratt's Bank in Portland Square."

"Was that so very much safer, then?"

"The insurance company, Krafft International, certainly thought it was—at any rate, for as long as Asa was out of the country. So Asa dutifully took it along there, with a Safeguard, the day before he left."

"What safeguard?"

"Not what, who: a man from the Safeguard Security Corps. It was a condition of Asa's insurance policy that a Safeguard man had to be with the *Reine* whenever it wasn't actually under lock and key."

Humbleby wriggled back into his chair and sipped his drink. "So far, so good," he presently went on. "And what happened next was that a week ago Asa arrived back at London Docks on the *Luis Pizarro*—like me, he's terrified of airplanes, so he traveled both ways by sea—and rang me up the moment he got on shore, and asked me if I was free to come along with him and his precious diamond and the Safeguard man on a trip to his cottage in Dorset, where he was scheduled to show the diamond off to a possible purchaser.

"Well, I didn't all that much want to go, but on the other hand the Yard's a terrible place nowadays, full of great grinning oafs who've never read a book for pleasure in their lives, and I get away from it whenever I possibly can. So here was an excuse, of sorts, and I took it."

"Yes, I can understand that all right," said Fen. "But what did he want you *for?* I mean, what did he *say?*"

"He said it would be nice to see me again and he was sure I'd like to have a look at the diamond."

"And you believed that?"

"Well, not entirely," said Humbleby. "I thought there was probably something a bit funny going on. But that, you see, was all the more reason why I *should* be there. Only unfortunately, as it turned out, I wasn't quite suspicious enough. Anyway, I went."

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"I went, and we met at Pratt's Bank. Asa came there direct from the docks—and by the way, there's absolutely no doubt about that; since the thing happened, we've checked and double checked all of his movements, backwards, forwards, and inside out, and he certainly had no time for any tricky business between getting off the boat and meeting me.

"I was the first to get to Pratt's. Then the Safeguard man arrived, a menacing figure called Shirtcliff. Last came Asa, full of the joys of spring. And I didn't like that. He was too cheerful altogether, for a man besotted with a diamond who is on the way to losing it to a customer after only a few weeks' ownership. He needed a customer, yes, and he was lucky to get one. Even so, he ought to have been just a bit glum about it, not completely cock-a-hoop.

"Asa went down into the vaults, and Shirtcliff and I went with him as far as the system allowed, which wasn't, of course, the whole way. However, he was out again in a couple of minutes or less, waving a quite large black-velvet jewel box; and he handed this to Shirtcliff; and Shirtcliff took a look inside it, and grunted affirmatively, and shut the box up again, and put it in his brief case; and we all went upstairs again, and out of the bank, and round the corner to where a self-drive hired car was waiting; and in that Asa drove us down to Stickwater in Dorset, me sitting beside him in the front passenger seat, and Shirtcliff in the back glowering and clutching his brief case with the diamond in it.

"Our next consideration must be Asa's brother Ben."

"Isn't this narrative becoming rather mannered, Humbleby?" said Fen restively. "And by the way, is it going to turn out that there's some question of paste's having been substituted for the real thing?"

"No, it isn't. That doesn't arise at all."

"I see. Well, when is something going to happen?"

"In a moment, in a moment. Ben first. Ben is younger than his brother Asa, and much bigger and tougher. He's also the dependent one of the pair—did at one time have a jeweler's business of his own, but he was no good at it and it went bust. Since then he's lived off Asa, and also lived *with* Asa, either in their flat in London, or else in this dismal little house in Dorset. Ben looks after the domestic side, in so far as it gets looked after at all. They're unmarried, and they do without servants, and they live together in a sort of devoted squalor.

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"Envisage, then," said Humbleby dramatically, "this car—a puce Cortina, I ought perhaps to add—driving down from London to Stickwater in Dorset, Asa Braham at the wheel, myself beside him, the man Shirtcliff in the back, the diamond—"

"Humbleby, haven't you told me all this already?" Fen was more fretful than ever. "And come to that, is something portentous or significant going to happen on this drive—something relevant, I mean, to what you seem to be trying to describe to me?"

"Come to *that*," said Humbleby a shade aggrievedly, "aren't you being unduly particular? All I'm trying to do is give you the atmosphere, the ambience, the whole—"

"Yes, granted, and very nice too, but my point is that the drive itself—"

"It admittedly wasn't important." Forced to this concession, Humbleby busied himself with finding and lighting a cheroot. "Asa talked a good deal, but then, he always does, not just on drives, but on every occasion, everywhere. So at last, without incident, we arrived."

"At last."

"Not at any sort of gracious little country seat, but at a tiny, extraordinarily unprepossessing example of Victorian farmhouse architecture, subsequently transformed, at no very great expense, into a small dwelling-house. It was very isolated, with grounds which were, I suppose, fairly extensive, but horribly unkempt. As to the house itself, that really amounted to little more than two up, two down, with kitchen and bath: all dispiritingly gray and damp and obviously uncared-for.

"Ben Braham opened the front door for us, and seemed—I have to say 'seemed'—in an evil temper. He took us into the front room right, a tattered sort of living room, and offered us a drink. There was thereupon a row. The only drinks actually available, it turned out, were either home-brewed beer, made years before from some sort of chemist's kit, or a rather small amount of Casca Oli. Ben was supposed to have got drink in, but for some reason—perhaps to give cogency to his being on bad terms with his brother Asa—hadn't in fact done so. He was supposed to have done a lot of things, including, in response to a radiogram from the *Luis Pizarro*, coming down earlier in the day to 'open the house up.'

"Well, he was there, all right, but that was about the most you could say. 'I've packed my bag,' he told us—and in fact there was a suitcase in the hall

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outside—'and you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go back to London and have myself a bloody great binge.'

"This announcement apparently didn't strike Asa favorably, giving rise, indeed, to a prolonged spell of angry fraternal shouting and counter-shouting. Even so, I stayed suspicious, as the words flew round and about my head. Meanwhile, the egregious Shirtcliff—who'd refused both Casca Oli and home-brewed beer, apparently more on principle than because they were equally odious—continued to nurse the *Reine des Odalisques* in its fat jewel box in his brief case on his lap.

"So there we all four of us were, in this awful living room, sipping ullage while a row went on. And now, to make a fifth, the potential customer for the *Reine* arrived. You've heard of Clyde Savitt?"

"The film star."

"Yes."

"He buys diamonds for his wife."

"Yes—like Richard Burton, though perhaps on not quite so massive a scale."

"And he's an expert on diamonds, isn't he?"

"Yes—again like Burton, I suppose, up to a point. But with Savitt there's an extra dimension. Savitt *pere* was a jeweler, and Savitt *fils*, before he went into pictures, was intended to become one too. So before the lures of the old cine trapped him, he learned a lot, about diamonds particularly. In short, he'd be pretty nearly impossible to deceive. He wanted the *Reine* for his wife; he knew it, from its many photographs; and when he eventually *saw* it—"

Humbleby sucked at his cheroot, long and deep. "We went," he said, "into the room on the other side of the little hallway. That is, all of us did except Ben, who was still—and again I have to say 'seemed'—sulking. Savitt, I gathered, was resting between pictures at a modest country house conveniently close by. He had come to Asa, rather than the other way round, because he didn't want his wife to know anything at all in advance about this possible jewel transaction. It was all perfectly plausible, and perfectly plain.

"What was less plausible, and certainly less immediately plain, was why we'd made the move from the one room to the other. I can see the reasons now, of course, but then, hindsight's a wonderful thing. Asa's notion was that in the living room where we'd all started off, Savitt included, the light wasn't adequate, or at any

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rate, not adequate for examining a diamond.

"But this deficiency, though certainly real enough, didn't seem to be much remedied when we got to Asa's 'study,' which had in its ceiling a bulb of low wattage, so much so that although it was a small room, and we were crowded together, we could barely make out the expressions on each other's faces. I must now," said Humbleby with some dignity, "describe this room to you."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Small, then. And not what you'd call overfurnished, either. There was a round table, at about the middle. There was a minute flat-topped desk with nothing on it. There was an old-fashioned safe—completely empty, it subsequently turned out. There were a crack-springed armchair, and a desk chair. And finally, in one corner, you could see a huddle of old Casca Oli boxes, with a couple of Anglepoise lamps and a few other odd bits and pieces. No pictures, and only one window, and that had steel shutters over it, closed and locked.

"By way of making light conversation, Asa explained that the shutters had been closed and locked for years, he having lost the only key. They had been put in, he said, at a time when he'd been in the habit of bringing stones down to Stickwater, until finally the insurance companies had said, to his great grief, that he mustn't do it any longer. Also from earlier, less stringent days dated the safe, and the admittedly pretty solid door—much more solid, as we found to our cost, than any of the others in the house—which we'd come in by.

"Light, Asa said; we must have, he said, like the dying Goethe, more light; and he started fussing with the two Anglepoise lamps, neither of which, it soon became clear, was fitted with a plug in any way corresponding with the one socket in the room. By now, I need hardly tell you, my suspicions were very serious indeed. But even so, how was *I* to know what was planned, what was in fact just about to happen?

"Anyway, there it was—Asa fatuously muttering about adaptors; Ben presumably still in the living room, or possibly already off, with his prepared suitcase, for his projected binge in London; Clyde Savitt, the unlucky Shirtcliff, and my almost equally unlucky self hovering around Asa in this dreadful little room, waiting for inchoate possibilities to congeal into some sort of event. This

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they almost immediately did, but not before Clyde Savitt, tiring like the rest of us of Asa's busy fumblings with electric cords, suggested that we might perfectly well have a preliminary look at the *Reine* straight away. And Asa was all for this.

"Leaving the Anglepoises, Asa gave instructions to Shirtcliff. And with the air of a man acting insufferably against his better judgment, Shirtcliff took the jewel box from his brief case, placed it in the middle of the round table and retired angrily to stand with his back against the superspecial door, which we'd closed after us. Shirtcliff had already inspected, and found sound, the steel window shutters; now he was adopting what even a much more intelligent man would have thought the best general defensive position available.

"He was wrong about that, but really, one can scarcely blame him.

"Jewel box on table, then; and Asa advances on it, opens it reverently, and stands gazing at its contents, even under that impossibly dim illumination, with the pride of a Mrs. Worthington whose daughter has not only gone on the stage, but unaccountably made a spectacular success of the business.

"As to Clyde Savitt, whose behavior up to this point had been impeccable, excitement overcame him. He snatched the *Reine* out of the box, Shirtcliff stiffening visibly; snatched a loupe from his pocket, and stood there making his examination in a breathless silence which affected all of us.

"Then he said, 'Yes, that's it, all right.' "

"I mention this crucial remark not to criticize its civility, or even to suggest that diamond-mad people go diamond-mad whenever they see a diamond, to the exclusion of absolutely everything else. I mention it because it was *true*. You said something earlier about the possibility of a paste substitute. But Savitt was sure then, and is sure now, that what he had in his hand was the *Reine* and nothing but the *Reine*—and this in spite of the awful light and the unfortunate circumstances generally.

"Savitt said, 'Yes, that's it, all right. And I want to buy it.' And he put it back in its box, rather quickly, as if it was burning his fingers.

"And then suddenly we were in complete darkness."

Humbleby shook his head, not in negation but sadly. An efficient officer, he was consequently finding his own part

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in these proceedings disagreeable to recall.

"Looking back on it," he said, "I remember, or imagine I remember, the click of the main switch. This, along with the meter and so forth, was in the hallway immediately outside the study. And it was this certainly that was used. So there we were, in chaos and old night, with the little gleam of the diamond in its open jewel box on the round table our only illumination of any sort. By then it was blackness outside the house—no moon or stars; and even if it hadn't been, the steel shutters over the window would have cut out any light absolutely.

"Then the door burst open—no light at all from the hallway outside, you understand—and someone came tearing into the room, and the gleam of the diamond winked out, and the someone ran off again, and the door slammed, shutting us in; and the footsteps went away, out of the front door, and crunched quickly along the drive out of earshot; and somewhere distantly, a car engine started and revved up, and then that was gone too.

"From the moment of the light going out to the moment of the intruder nipping off again, and slamming the door, was, I suppose, scarcely more than three seconds. Enough, though, for the *Reine* to be gone.

"Shirtcliff had been bashed in the small of the back by the door opening and had gone sprawling. Even so, he was the first to recover. But it was hopeless. Thanks to Asa's precautions, the room door had a Yale lock on it; and the intruder had reversed the snib as he rushed in; so all he had to do when he left was click the door shut and reverse the snib on the outer side—there exist, unfortunately, Yale locks with this double arrangement.

"And we were trapped."

"Yes, we were trapped," said Humbleby, "and for close to two hours. I know this must seem nearly incredible, but you must remember those locked steel shutters, and also the fact that there was no telephone, and also the fact that apart from my cigarette lighter, which was by no means inexhaustible, we couldn't see a bloody thing we were doing. Of course we shouted, and we banged. But Ben, it appeared—the only other person in the house—had long since left.

"That, anyway, was his story, when it came to the crunch: he'd gone off almost straight away after we moved from the living room to the

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study. And this never was, or could be, disproved.

"Me, I never believed it for a moment. I was as sure as could be that it was Ben who had turned off the main switch, careered into the room, nabbed the diamond, and whisked off again, all with the happy collaboration of his brother Asa. But proving it was, and is, something else again. Shirtcliff could have had an accomplice, or even, come to that, Clyde Savitt. What, at that stage, did we know? What *could* we know?

"I'm fairly good at locks, but there were no tools—apart from scraps of Anglepoises which Shirtcliff tore apart with his bare hands. So, as I've said, it was nearly two hours before we got that door open at last. Hanging on to Shirtcliff's sleeve, with the lighter guttering in my hand, I hauled him outside, turned the main switch back on, and then hauled him back inside again.

"Strip!" I said.

"To do him justice, he saw the point and stripped at once. I went over his discarded clothes very carefully, and then, equally carefully, I went over *him*. We're supposed, at the Yard, to have read a lot of books about such things, and I can distinctly remember glancing through one or two of the least offensive of them. Asa, who was putting on a great act of shock and horror, at this stage started bellowing about bodily orifices, but as I pointed out to him, not just the diamond had disappeared from the study, but a bloody big jewel case as well.

"Bodily orifices, I pointed out to Asa, were very unlikely receptacles for that. And in fact the jewel case was eventually found, thrown away at the side of the drive, only a few yards from the front door. Outside the house. By that time, it was, I need hardly say, empty.

"Shirtcliff—'clean'—ran off to a telephone with instructions from me. Meanwhile, I myself went over the study with what detective writers call a fine-tooth comb, and which—"

"Humbleby, listen a moment. It—"

"—and which, I can assure you, brought nothing whatever, of any relevance, to light. I also searched Savitt and Asa, and they searched me. Still nothing. And there could be nothing. Someone had burst in, grabbed the *Reine* in its box, disappeared again—and that was all there was to it.

"Still, you understand, I *had* to take all the precautions, I *had* to do the searching—just in case. But nothing. I was very scrupulous about it all, and I

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can assure you—nothing, then or afterwards."

Fen stared at his guest with more than usual attention. He had found the tale, if not exactly brilliant, at any rate an interesting one. "And finally?" he prompted.

"Finally Ben Braham was stopped in his car by the police at Deare, getting eighty miles from Stickwater, a two-and-a-half hours' drive. No diamond on him or in him, of course, and no diamond anywhere in the car. How could there have been? Eighty miles! At any point, at his leisure, knowing perfectly well how appallingly we were trapped back at that loathsome little house, he could have turned off the London road into a lane, stopped at a field gate, gone into the field, poked a hole with his finger in the bank, injected the diamond, covered it up, made a careful note of the place—he had a flashlight in his car, but that doesn't prove anyone guilty of anything—and then simply traipsed back and driven on again. He could, and can, simply return and pick up the diamond whenever it suits him."

"Which won't be yet."

"No, of course not yet; probably not for a long time. Not, anyway, until a long time after Krafft has paid the insurance money. Ben and Asa will know, in any case, that we shall be keeping an eye on them. They won't make any move until they're completely certain it won't backfire in the form of a Conspiracy to Defraud charge."

"And when they do at last make their move to pick up the diamond," said Fen, "what then? Does Asa Braham get it anonymously through the post from a conscience-stricken thief?"

"Lord, no." And Humbleby smiled, with some affection, at his host, whom it was pleasing to find, for the moment, almost as dim-witted as he, Humbleby, had throughout the whole Braham business felt himself to be. "Because in that case, you see, the insurance money would have to be repaid, and Asa wouldn't be able to afford that. But it'll be reward enough, for Asa, just to have the *Reine* back and be able to gloat over it secretly. As I've told you, he's crazy about stones. And that, I suppose, has been the basis of the whole trouble."

Fen thought for a bit. Then he said mildly, "Superstitions about diamonds. You started by talking about those—but you don't, if I may say so, seem to be altogether free from them yourself."

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"I know practically everything about diamonds," said Humbleby, with some indignation. "Diamonds, now—"

"Yes, of course. But you say that when the lights went out—and there was no sort of reflected light—this particular diamond shone in the dark."

"Yes, certainly it did. Diamonds are self-luminescent. Look up any book on the subject and you'll find—"

"No, I shan't. Sorry, Humbleby, but not for the circumstances *you've* described. Diamonds do shine in the dark, yes. But they don't produce light, like glowworms. They store it and reproduce it. For a diamond to shine in the dark it must have been subjected to light first—fairly bright light, and fairly recently.

"But what sort of light had your precious *Reine des Odalisques* been under? Well, if the tales are true, it'd been for three weeks in the darkness of a bank's safe-deposit vault; then a man called Shirtcliff glanced at it for a moment, in ordinary daylight; finally, it was exposed to a low-wattage bulb for what doesn't sound like much more than two minutes—"

"*Less* than two minutes." Humbleby struck his brow, with his clenched fist, in a transpontine manner which was nevertheless patently sincere. "God, what an imbecile I've been! You mean, Asa was so infatuated with the thing that he took it with him to South America."

"Yes, that seems likely."

"And then marched into Pratt's Bank with it in his pocket, and then simply popped it into the jewel box which he *had* left there, and brought it out again."

"Almost certain, I'd say. The diamond had stored all that light because he was staring at it virtually up to the last possible moment. Either he'd forgotten that when Ben put their plan into operation the diamond would shine, or else—which seems more likely—he just thought that the interval, between the light going out and the *Reine* being grabbed, would be too short for anyone to notice the luminescence."

"Well, *I* noticed," said Humbleby. "The question is, did Savitt? Did Shirtcliff? If they both did"—and here an unhealthy revengeful gleam appeared in Humbleby's eye—"Asa's claim on Krafft Insurance isn't going to look too good."

"If he disgracefully neglected a specified precaution, then the policy would be void."

"Void."

"And did only Asa have access to that Pratt's Bank

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safe-deposit vault? I mean, if he could just give the key to someone else, he could say—"

"No, it had to be Asa. Couldn't be anyone else."

And here Fen considered Humbleby with a faint air of displeasure which, except between such old friends, might have seemed slightly ungracious. "I don't altogether dislike the sound of your Asa," he said. "Of course, it's bad to try and defraud insurance companies, and if for all of you that diamond did in fact shine in the dark, then . . . Even so, there are some moods"—and here Fen brought out the sherry again—"in which it's possible to feel the thing was worth a try."

"Asa withdrew his claim," said Humbleby when six months later he and Fen met coincidentally at the Travellers', "because Savitt and Shirtcliff had both, like me, glimpsed the *Reine* self-luminescing. So the claim wouldn't wash—and now, I understand, Asa's quite a poor man. He makes out, though, as poor men so often mysteriously do. Is your conscience at rest?"

"Shirtcliff?"

"Sacked from Safeguard for incompetence, and at once taken on by the Metropolitan Police."

"Savitt?"

"Richer and more famous and more courteous than ever."

"The diamond?"

"Well . . . somewhere. I suppose we'll never know."

They never did know, but at the last one man, without knowing it, knew.

Police Constable Bowker's "manor" was centered on the hamlet of Amble Harrowby, a focus for much rich agricultural activity. Left-wing inclined himself, Bowker was unable to suppress at least a theoretical distaste for the local Socialist peer, Lord Lewis, whose national egalitarianism had somehow never prevented him from enjoying such benefits as an inherited title and inherited wealth could bestow.

At the same time Bowker realized that in this respect he was perhaps being a little naive, the more so as Lord Lewis went to such particular trouble to be pleasant to everyone, Bowker himself by no means excluded. There could scarcely—Bowker reflected, as he buzzed through the lanes in his white crash helmet on his motorbike—be a more agreeably conscienceless man in the entire land.

In particular, this scheme of a trout lake was good. Lord Lewis had many farm tenancies on his property; one of these—always notable for the age, idleness, and incapacity of

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its tenant—had recently been vacated by death; and Lord Lewis was taking the opportunity of converting some fifteen acres of notoriously unproductive land into a large-scale lake for fishing.

Now, Police Constable Bowker, whatever his general feelings about Lord Lewis, didn't at all disapprove of this. On the contrary, since the lake was to be a natural-seeming sort, confluent with the surrounding mild bulges of the countryside, he felt, and felt quite strongly, that here was an instance where private riches might quite well redound to the public good.

He stopped his motorcycle, therefore, at a specially good point of vantage—Copeman's Rise—from which the lake-making proceedings, which had by now been going on for two weeks, could be unusually well viewed.

Immense scars, bulldozer-induced, lay across the land. Hedgerows had been ripped up and tossed aside. Tons of unsifted earth were being truck-laden and whipped off to unknown dumping grounds. The whole spectacle was one of massive alteration and change.

Bowker's heart warmed. Soon, all this unavoidable scooping out would give way to a placid expanse of brownish waters—Bowker's romanticism would have preferred bluish, but his practicality forbade this—lightly ruffled by the prevailing winds.

So far, so good. But as Bowker came to a halt it became evident to him that his emotions regarding this presently tormented landscape, so soon to be converted to beauty, were not entirely shared. Two men, who had parked their shabby car close by, were having to support each other, arms round shoulders, in order to contemplate the scene with equanimity.

Bowker thought that he perhaps recognized them. They were a jeweler and his brother with a country cottage at Stickwater, 15 miles away. Bowker also thought that they were possibly supporting one another because they were drunk.

But then he shifted a little nearer and decided he had been wrong about that.

Bowker went back to his motorcycle, restarted the engine, gunned it up, and headed for the London road. There are some things even a country copper thinks it best not to interfere with; and one is when he sees two male adults watching a trout lake being made with great scalding tears pouring down their cheeks.

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This is the 400th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . .

Number 400. We'll let the number speak for itself . . .

The author, Robert C. Schweik, is a Professor of English at the Fredonia campus of the State University of New York. He is a specialist both in bibliography and in the Victorian period of English literature and has published scholarly studies of the novels of Thomas Hardy and the poetry of Tennyson and Browning. A classical man . . .

In his spare time he does "electrical and plumbing repairs for his colleagues," and relaxes by sailing and "sometimes" by playing chess.

Professor Schweik's "first story" is engrossing and ingratiating—at least, we found it so, and are happy to let it commemorate what we consider a most satisfying and rewarding event—the publication of EQMM's 400th "first story." Not surprisingly, the story is classical in concept and execution, and it may remind some readers of the Harry Kemelman stories about Professor Nicholas (Nicky) Welt—a comparison meant to compliment both writers . . .

THE APPEARANCE OF FACT

by ROBERT C. SCHWEIK

I had closed my bookstore a half hour before lunch, turned down the hotplate to let the leek soup simmer, and trudged through a heavy January snow up to the College—all because Paul Engel had insisted that I see the Hinman collator that the College library had just acquired for him. With that machine, Paul assured me, he could tell at once whether the same page from two copies of the same book varied by so much as a comma, and he spoke about it in the enthusiastic

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tones men usually reserve for new cars.

I've never been able to understand why Paul devoted himself to such trivia, but he was particularly defensive about his profession as a bibliographer, and for the sake of our friendship I avoided the topic as much as I could. Besides, I had learned from experience that he had a curious knack for drawing surprising conclusions from details other people seemed to overlook, and I'd come to have a grudging admiration for the ferocious single-mindedness with which he attacked a problem once he was attracted to it.

We had met shortly after I had bought the stock of a small bookstore in Northfield, a little upstate New York town with a branch of the State University just large enough to keep one bookseller solvent. The move had meant for me an investment in serenity after nearly 20 years of New York commuting and the recent agony of a messy divorce, but at the beginning I was so lonely that I'd taken to having lunch in the College cafeteria where I could usually find someone to talk to—and before I knew it I was 20 pounds heavier; so when Paul complained one day about his own weight, I suggested that we avoid the temptations of the cafeteria by making our own quick bowl of soup for lunch, and in this way our alternating soup kitchens had been born—one day behind my store, the next in his office.

Today was my turn, and I felt myself getting hungrier as I tried to appear interested in Paul's demonstration. We would have less time than usual, I knew, because he would have to return to the College to chair a meeting. For the past few days Paul's lunchtime conversation had been about the nasty academic squabble he predicted would result when a College committee voted on whether Peter Ahrens or Carl Franklin would be recommended for the single permanent position available in the Sociology Department. Ahrens, a new Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, had garnered a vociferous student following but had failed altogether to show any talent for original scholarship; Franklin had published a series of highly original papers, but was said by the Ahrens supporters to be a wretched teacher.

Paul's job would be to preside over the warring Ahrens and Franklin factions in the committee, and from what he had already said I knew he didn't look forward to the job. Now, with the meeting less than two hours away, he was letting

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himself become totally involved in a monologue on the merits of his collator, and when a glance at my watch showed it was well past twelve, I found a gap in our one-sided conversation and injected a remark about the infinite capacity of bibliographers to find ingenious ways of multiplying useless facts.

"You're just getting hungry, Harry," he replied evenly as he turned off the blinking lights of the collator; but I knew my verbal jab had stung him, and as we went down the steps of Carter Library he sounded more defensive.

"Facts don't interest me, Harry," he began earnestly. "That those two pages we examined today are identical is now a known fact, and no more interesting to a bibliographer than the fact that ice is cold. Appearances are the only really interesting things, and the collator—"

"Oh, come on," I snapped as I saw him slipping back into another monologue on his new gadget. "It's easy for you academics to talk about facts and appearances when all you're dealing with are book pages. If you were faced with anything really complex you'd be as likely as the next fellow to be stuck trying to tell the difference."

"Test me," he said gently, but with the look I had come to learn implied that he was mentally preparing to demolish whatever example I chose to present. But by this time the bookstore had come into view, and I smiled to myself as I recalled that inside I had a collection of facts or appearances that had stubbornly resisted being sorted out.

Nearly seven months earlier, just after Paul had left town for his annual summer vacation on the Cape, Malcolm Bryant, Chairman of the College History Department, had been found murdered in the apartment he had occupied for the two weeks since his wife had discovered what half the town already knew—that her husband frequently spent his afternoons at the Adirondack Motel on the edge of town with a graduate student named Marianne Holm. Whatever attractions Bryant had for Marianne Holm were pretty much invisible to most people who knew him. He was the kind of man who would request that I order $40 worth of books and then refuse to accept them when the order came in.

Bryant was sly and secretive to the point of paranoia, and to his students he was "double-check Bryant" for his habit of checking every reference in student papers and triumphant-

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ly failing them for some small inaccuracy. It was especially his quality of gleeful mercilessness that made him so universally hated by students and younger colleagues alike, and it was long a commonplace among wives of junior faculty to wonder aloud how Virginia Bryant could put up with him.

Apparently she had reached her limit with the Marianne Holm affair; in any case, within two days Bryant had boxed up his books, packed most of his clothes, and moved into a small furnished apartment across the street from the campus.

Ironically Marianne Holm promptly deserted him and began to spend her afternoons at the Adirondack with Carl Franklin. Bryant was certainly not the man to take kindly to that, and during the last two weeks of his life he mounted a campaign to persuade members of the Tenure Committee to vote in favor of Peter Ahrens when the Ahrens-Franklin question would come before them. It was the aftermath of that campaign that Paul would have to deal with in the committee meeting later in the afternoon, but I reflected that by the time he had returned from the Cape, the killing itself was nearly three months past and town talk had turned to other topics; probably he would have heard no more about it than what little I had mentioned in a letter.

So, while Paul sat down to make the best of a leek soup now simmered down to the consistency of pudding, I went to the basement, dug out old issues of the Northfield *Republican*, and boldly circled the articles where, in the elaborate and circumstantial detail that small-town papers devote to unusual local news, the Bryant murder had been reported.

"I'm testing you," I said, as I passed them to Paul. He frowned for a moment, smiled grimly in recollection, and began to read, while I poked at my soup, mentally reviewed what I could recall of the events surrounding Bryant's death, and occasionally volunteered private bits of information I had picked up from Lieutenant Greaves of the local police during our weekly Friday-evening poker sessions.

Virginia Bryant had testified at the Coroner's inquest that no sooner had Bryant left than he began a daily series of repentant telephone calls to her, and it was only the fact that he had not called for four days that prompted her to use the excuse of returning more clothes to stop at his apartment to see if he might be ill. She found the back door unlocked and the

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living room a shambles—books strewn over the floor, tables and chairs overturned, pictures on the walls askew, and Bryant's body, half covered by a bookcase that had fallen on top of him.

An autopsy had placed the time of death some four days earlier, and there had been no trouble determining the cause: Bryant's skull had been severely fractured by blows from the pointed end of an electric iron found in the kitchen, and bits of scalp and hair lodged in the crack between the soleplate and frame had been positively identified as his. It had not been difficult, either, to place the time of the murder: Bryant's mantel clock had tipped over in the struggle and had stopped at 10:13.

With such evidence and the testimony given at the Coroner's inquest, the police began to reconstruct what probably had happened. Bryant had taken the upper apartment in a converted turn-of-the-century house across from the campus. After he had announced his support of Ahrens, the two were frequently seen there together and on the day of the murder Ahrens had helped Bryant unpack books and household equipment from four to six in the afternoon. The iron had been temporarily set on the living-room mantel.

When Ahrens left about six, he had walked to the campus with Professor and Mrs. Crawford who occupied the apartment below Bryant's. They separated at the school, Ahrens going on to the cafeteria and later the library, the Crawfords to a testimonial dinner being held for Professor Crawford who was retiring that year. When the Crawfords returned home about midnight they discovered there were no lights in their apartment. Professor Crawford had gone to the basement to check the fuses and discovered instead that someone had thrown the master switch.

In a small town like Northfield doors were often left unlocked, and at the time it seemed to the Crawfords nothing more than a prank, probably done by one of the older neighborhood boys who sometimes poked around the cellar. But after the discovery of Bryant's body they reported the master-switch incident to the police, and Crawford did remember having to reset his electric clocks ahead nearly two hours.

Lieutenant Greaves had interviewed the Crawfords, and at our next poker session I asked him if he had turned up anything interesting.

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"Look, Harry," he began, "you're probably thinking of something far-fetched. In fact the motive was simple robbery, and it's almost certain that Bryant's killing was not deliberate. Whoever the thief was, he was professional enough not to leave fingerprints, and no doubt he had selected the Crawfords' apartment because like a pro he studied newspaper announcements to plan his hits and knew that because of the testimonial dinner the Crawfords would be gone for most of the evening.

"Crawford's flat was on the ground floor, so it offered a good chance for quiet entry through the back door or porch windows; of course the thief carried his own light and took the additional precaution of turning off the electricity so he would have a better chance of getting away in case the Crawfords returned early. Probably he had even paid a visit to the basement some night earlier just to check the location of the switch."

"But how does that explain Bryant's murder?" I objected. "That kind of thief usually doesn't kill."

"Of course not," said Greaves impatiently. "That's what I meant when I said it wasn't deliberate. We found some fresh scratches on the jamb of the Crawfords' back door which indicated that the thief had tried that but was stopped by a deadbolt thrown from inside, and Crawford had had the good sense to install special window locks after reading about a burglary in town six months ago. If he had used his head, the thief would have given the whole thing up as a bad job at that point, but instead he went quietly up the back stairs, found Bryant's rear door open, and decided to salvage something of the evening by sneaking out what loose valuables he could, even though the house was occupied.

"It was, of course, a risky thing, but he probably counted on surprise and speed if he was seen. Unfortunately Bryant surprised him in the living room and made the mistake of grappling with him. There must have been a terrific fight that ended when the thief grabbed the iron and kept hitting Bryant until he went down. When it was finally over, he got out as fast as he could, and dropped the iron in the kitchen as he went. The worst of it is, it's the kind of killing that most often goes unsolved. Senseless, with no connection between the victim and the killer."

In fact, nothing did turn up in the following days, except that a funny little man (that was Greaves's description) from

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the State Attorney's office in Albany had appeared, poked through Bryant's apartment, and noticed his desk calendar—the kind that is a bulky pad with tear-off sheets for each day's appointments. Somehow he treated the pad to bring out the impression left on it by the writing done on the previous leaf and triumphantly discovered nothing more than that on the day before the murder, Bryant had jotted down the words "call Virginia" and "Ahrens"—no news at all to Greaves after Virginia Bryant had already testified that Bryant had called her and Ahrens had spoken of his appointment on that day to talk over the matter of his tenure battle.

Lieutenant Greaves particularly liked to tell that story about the man from the State Attorney's office, and he did it with the special relish of the professional whose judgment has been vindicated. He had a high estimation of his own abilities that I knew Paul did not share, so when I finished adding what I had learned from Greaves to the stories Paul had read in the *Republican*, I couldn't resist remarking innocently that with all the information before him he might at least do better than the Lieutenant.

At that Paul gave me a pained look, got up abruptly with the excuse that he had to use the telephone in the front of the store, and was gone so long that I began to think I had really made him angry. By the time he returned, I had finished my own soup and had cleaned the dishes. Paul looked so grim I almost wanted to let him off the hook, but I couldn't resist taunting him once more.

"'Test me!' you said, so I'm testing you!"

"All right, all right, Harry," he grumbled, "but any man who has to depend on Greaves and the Northfield *Republican* for information is working under an impossible handicap. Would it be enough if I came up with a more plausible theory than Greaves did?"

"Right," I said. "But remember, you're going to have to *prove* it's better, not just say it is."

"Agreed," Paul said just a bit more eagerly than I had expected. "In fact, if you're willing to bet the price of the phone call I just made, we'll let Greaves himself be the judge."

"If I were you I wouldn't bet even a dime at those odds," I laughed, "but go ahead. You're on."

"Okay," Paul said. "Let's start with the *Republican* pictures of Bryant's apartment

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after the killing. Not much to go on, of course, but what do they suggest to you?"

"That there had been a terrible fight, of course."

"Just so," Paul agreed, slipping into that lecturing manner I disliked so much when it was directed at me. "But rather too much so, I should say. Of course two men struggling would be likely to knock things about, but all this? Do you really suppose they would have hit three pictures out of line on three different walls?"

"Of course they might," I replied. "I don't think you can be sure of probabilities in a matter like this. Anyway, for the sake of your theory that's already beginning to sound pretty implausible, go on—but just wait till Greaves hears this!"

"Well, let's start with the premise that there wasn't a fight, that the room was arranged to look like it," Paul continued, "and see where it leads us."

I winced at the tone of his "see where it leads us," but Paul went right on.

"Why would anyone want to create that impression? After all, a murder can be disguised as a robbery attempt without the necessity of rearranging all the furniture—better, in fact, by simply taking some valuables. But consider. Although murder and robbery can take place without a fight, a fight such as was supposed to have happened in that room couldn't take place without a great deal of noise, could it?"

"I suppose not," I agreed, "but where does that get you?"

"To the conclusion that if the appearance of a struggle was deliberately contrived, it was probably done to create the impression that the affair must have taken place while the Crawfords were away, or otherwise they would have heard it. Which suggests, of course, that the killing took place while the Crawfords were home."

"But Ahrens had been with Bryant for a couple of hours," I objected, "and when he left, so did the Crawfords—unless you mean that Ahrens quietly killed Bryant and then arranged the room to make it look as if what took place could not possibly have happened when he was there?"

"Precisely," Paul responded, now fully into his worst professorial manner. "If Ahrens wanted to kill Bryant, he could easily have managed it. Like nearly everyone else in town he would have known, of course, about Crawford's testimonial dinner. On some pretext or

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other he appears at Bryant's door a couple of hours early; he's been there often before and is sure to know where in the apartment to find some convenient weapon for the job. When Bryant's back is turned, he knocks him out with one blow from the iron and then adds a few more blows to be sure.

"He has, he knows, nearly two hours to finish his work—to be very sure Bryant has died, to arrange the room to appear as if a noisy struggle had taken place, to set the mantel clock to the proper time, to clean up, and to wait until the Crawfords were leaving so that he could go down to meet them and later have no difficulty establishing the fact that he had left as early as six."

"But aren't you overlooking the fact that there was an attempt to burglarize the Crawfords' apartment," I objected.

"No fact there, of course," Paul answered. "Just the appearance of an attempt. Consider, now, that Ahrens walks with the Crawfords to the campus and then goes on just as he said to the cafeteria and then the library. The nice thing about the library is that, considering what Ahrens wanted to do, it provides exactly the right kind of alibi—not, of course, that Ahrens thought he'd really have any need to use it. When you're in a library you're expected to be moving around a bit, going to the stacks, to the catalogues, out for a smoke, and so forth, and it's the easiest thing in the world to slip out for ten or fifteen minutes; anyone who has seen you about before and after would think of you as having been in the library all the time.

"And even the question of exact times posed no problem. No one can safely suppose that any two clocks will not differ by as much as fifteen minutes, so if Ahrens encounters any difficulty slipping out of the library at just the right time, he can afford to wait a bit. When he does go, he slips across the street to Bryant's house sometime around ten, pulls the master switch to the Crawfords' apartment to provide a second apparently independent bit of evidence of the time of the murder, makes some scratches with a nail file or knife on the back-door jamb—and lo, in five minutes there is all the appearance of an attempted burglary that turned by accident into a murder of the man upstairs. And you can be sure, of course, that Ahrens made certain that the librarians remembered he was at the

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library. Probably stayed around until closing, in fact. And that was all there was to it."

"Look, Paul," I injected. "This whole thing is just a lot of nonsense. What makes you think that anyone, let alone Greaves, would prefer your theory to his? At least he has a presumed motive to account for what happened. Why in the world would Ahrens want to kill the very man who was doing the most to help him keep his job?"

"You're right, of course, that up to this point we have what are really two theories to account for the same set of appearances. That's what makes appearances so interesting. But you know that saying about the uselessness of a theory without a fact? Facts aren't interesting—just indispensable. The trouble with Greaves is that he hasn't got a fact to peg his theory on."

"But neither do you."

"Wrong, I do. Or, rather, I found the possibility of learning a fact from what the investigator from Albany turned up."

"You mean the words 'call Virginia' and 'Ahrens' on Bryant's appointment calendar? But I already told you that Bryant did call his wife that day and Ahrens did have an appointment. So what's important about that?"

"Nothing at all as to mistaking an appearance for a fact," Paul replied patiently. "The Albany investigator turns up this evidence and inquires as to who Virginia is; of course everyone assumes it is Virginia Bryant. But consider. Virginia Bryant testified that Bryant called her every day. Would a man who was calling his wife every day need a calendar reminder?"

"He might," I rejoined. "You can't rule that possibility absolutely out."

"Of course not," Paul went on, now a little less patiently. "But there's at least some possibility that the note was not a reminder for him to call his wife. Which in turn prompts a question about what other meaning those words could have. Of course 'Virginia' could have meant some other woman, but first, consider, Harry, what you know of Bryant—that secretiveness, suspiciousness, and excessive caution of his. If he suddenly felt he had to lend his support to some junior colleague from another department, what do you suppose old double-check Bryant would do?"

"You mean Bryant was checking up on Ahrens?"

"Exactly. And if you were checking up on a new Ph.D. from the University of Virginia,

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what better place to start than by calling the department there? The note with the words 'call Virginia' and 'Ahrens' could have been a reminder to call the University of Virginia to inquire about him."

"But you're just guessing, Paul," I objected. "What makes you think he learned anything that would make Ahrens want to kill him?"

"Ahrens didn't kill him," Paul replied.

I started to say, "But I thought you—" when Paul motioned me to wait.

"Ahrens is dead," he said, and paused a moment to let the point sink in.

"You're crazy," I replied. "He was in the bookstore just before I came up to the College to meet you. What are you talking about?"

"I'm saying that Peter Ahrens is dead. Our man *isn't* Ahrens. That's what Bryant found out when he called the Sociology Department at Virginia, and what I found out by doing the same thing just twenty minutes ago. Look, Harry, it isn't that complicated. When a man applies for a teaching job he writes letters of application and indicates that his transcripts and letters of recommendation are on file at the university where he took his degree."

"But wouldn't anyone who used those have to identify himself?"

"Usually not. It's all done by mail, you see. The colleges that are interested write directly to the Registrar's office and back come copies of official transcripts and letters of recommendation sent automatically by some clerk. And the fact is, nearly every institution accepts them automatically as positive evidence of the man's training and abilities."

"You mean," I asked, "someone is using Ahrens' transcripts?"

"Right. Peter Ahrens had just taken his doctorate at Virginia and was preparing to begin looking for a job; naturally he had his credentials on file at the Registrar's office. And then, as I just found out, he was killed in an auto accident in his home town. His friends, of course, knew that, and so did some people in the Virginia Sociology Department; but the Registrar's office isn't informed automatically, of course, and probably no one there knew anything about it.

"Now if you were in the position of a single young man who had studied in the same department with Ahrens, who had just failed his Doctor's orals, who had a powerful suspicion that the examiners

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were conspiring to persecute him, and who wanted desperately to show that he could be a successful member of a college faculty—what might you do?"

"He posed as Ahrens until Bryant found him out?"

"Exactly. He wouldn't have to know much about Ahrens to simply assume his academic identity. If he had studied in the same department he would have had much the same training. Even Ahrens' social security number was easily available; it's now a common practice to use it as the 'student number' at many institutions, and there's a personal interview for the job, but no one asks for identification at that time, and later birth certificates and other documents can be had simply by writing for them. With those one can get a driver's license, and, in short, it's really possible to get away with such an impersonation.

"Harry, there are other cases I've heard of rather like it. But can you imagine with what glee Bryant pounced on the poor fellow when he found out, and it would be like him, of course, to intend to keep the information completely his own secret until the moment when he would triumphantly use it."

"Even so," I replied, "it would be so risky a man would have to be crazy to try it."

"He probably is, Harry. When I finally managed to get the Chairman of the Sociology Department at Virginia, he suggested the name of a former graduate student whose appearance and recent history of mental problems might make him our man. In any case, after I finished with Virginia, I phoned Lieutenant Greaves who's going to pick our impostor up and we'll know soon enough. I have a hunch that Greaves will be willing to accept my theory about Bryant's death."

"By the way," Paul went on as he began to get into his coat. "I also called the Dean to have that committee meeting canceled for the time being. I'm free for the rest of the day, and if you could keep the store closed a bit longer, we could go back to the library and have another look at the collator."

I reached back into the cupboard and pulled out a bottle. "Look," I said, "I've had enough of that for today, and after this Ahrens business I think we should investigate this a little."

Paul took off his coat again and eased himself back into his chair. "The interesting thing about the collator—" he began.

I decided then to pour myself a double.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 401st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . After you have read the two "first stories" in this issue—Robert C. Schweik's "The Appearance of Fact" and Phyllis Ann Karr's "For Cake with Clotted Cream"—ask yourself: can you imagine two "first stories" more different from each other in every way? "The productive mind is the only true Philosopher's Stone, and creative artists are the true alchemists" . . .

The author, Phyllis Ann Karr (who believes that double letters in a name are lucky and who practices what she believes), was born in California in 1944, bred in Indiana, and got her degree from Colorado State University. She has done office work, substitute teaching, has been a children's librarian, and at the time of this writing, is a cataloguer in a university library. She began to write fiction "at the age of seven and has been at it ever since."

Her "first story" is intended to be an "episode" in her first novel, as yet unfinished . . .

FOR CAKE WITH CLOTTED CREAM

by PHYLLIS ANN KARR

Fancying myself to have fallen in love with Mistress Ferrule, I took counsel of Bet Crisp, as we lay together in the straw of her father's barn, how I might do away with Master Lawyer Ferrule and marry his widow.

Bet thought for a time, and replied, "They do say old Jem Tremiggan has the way of making little dolls, from the Egyptians he learned it, may be."

"Little dolls?" said I. "How might little dolls help me, sweeting?"

"Little dolls," said she again. "He makes a little doll to look like a man, what man you tell 'un. And what you do to the little doll, it happens to the

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man. Stick the doll, Master Lawyer feels it—toss 'un on the fire like a block, Master Lawyer burns with 'un—twist a little string round the doll's neck, Master Lawyer chokes like un's been hanged."

This took my fancy as a very pretty novelty, and I mused much, before sleeping, on the economy it would be to a State, when they had men to torture, to use little dolls rather than racks and suchlike engines, holding up to a man's face a doll made in his own image, and threatening to do such-and-such to it, and doing it before his eyes. And of how the body might shew no evidence of it after, though as to this last I was not sure, and made up my mind to ask old Tremiggan.

All haste was needed if I were to enjoy the sight of the operation: Master Ferrule, who was come down to read my father's will that same Friday of the 19th January, 1626, designed to return home the following morning.

I set out with Bet immediately after breaking our fast, my bowels and belly all of a pleasant eagerness, which became the more and more mingled with unease the nearer we came to the place, as I thought of Ezekiel Roscarnow of Sancreed and Sir Fulk Fairhaver down from Wales, whom none remembered seeing again after they went into Tremiggan's hut, the one twenty, the other twelve years agone.

Jem Tremiggan had for as long as I remembered kept very close to his dwelling (a suspicious thing in itself), so that I had seen him but once, shortly before Fairhaver disappeared, when Bet and I, with some other boys newly breeched, had gone shouting and throwing stones at his hut in childish sport, and I had called out I would burn him when I was grown, as my grandfather had burned better witches than he. Very huge and menacing Tremiggan had appeared to me then, when he came out at last to chase us away—huge and menacing as Giant Trebegan himself, whose name was so much like his own and who used to eat little children as he prowled our sands.

So I did not now go into Tremiggan's hut until Bet had been in first and come out again telling me he was in good humour, and then I went fingering the little bag with one of Saint Keyne's teeth and earth from her grave, which I had bought of a Bodmin peddlar as a charm against ill-wishers.

At six years old, we had thought that hut both slaugh-

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terhouse and rackhouse, with the gates to Hell beneath Tremiggan's bed, and daemons dancing there every night. Now, at nineteen, I found the inside of the hut plainer and uglier than the outside, with little of interest save a skull lacking the jawbone, which sat on what remained of the shelf above the fireplace, and bunches of dry crumbling herbs hung up on walls and beams—otherwise it was the poorest and most miserable lodging I had ever seen, no furnishings but a three-legged stool and a broken table, and no bed but a heap of mouldy straw.

And Tremiggan himself, a brittle small fellow with sallow skin and watery eyes, hunching over his dirty hearth, no more fearsome than a wet rooster. I put away Saint Keyne's earth in my doublet and went to light my pipe at his fire.

He started up at my approach, looking at me and baring his teeth, but too late now to affright me as when I had been six years old. Nor did he truly seem to wish to frighten off a buyer for his work. Pitifully few of them he must have, and mean enough their payments.

"Ah," says he in a crooning voice, "young Master, is it, as little Bet said is to come for a doll? Look'ee, young Master, old Jem's found 'un already for 'ee," and held up a common-looking thing enough, like any child's toy, with the head still a shapeless knobble of wood.

Old Jem begged I would tell him how to carve this into the likeness of the man I meant it for, which I did with relish, describing the beak nose, crab eyes, splayed temples, crooked lips, and long scraggly beard. When done, it was the very image of Ferrule, and twice as ugly.

It was a fascinating thing to watch Tremiggan's hands. At all other times they would shake and tremble like birds' feathers blown the wrong way by the sea wind, but when they carved and caressed the doll and wrapped it in old rags to imitate the lawyer's clothing, then those same gnarled hands were firm and steady as any surgeon's or executioner's. All this, and the Sheffield knife he used was fitter for butchering beeves than carving out dolls' faces shorter from crown to chin than the length of my thumb.

When I asked why he did not use a finer blade, he answered this was the only one he had owned these eighteen years, and had been even broader, but was worn down with sharpening. I offered to bring him another, of Toledo steel, as part of his pay,

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but he refused, saying this was his old friend, and he had rather have a good saffron cake with clotted cream. I promised him three, and a silk purse with twenty silver shillings, and a bed thrown into the bargain, with a real mattress and good cords, if the doll did as it should.

To finish, he dug a hole in the top of the doll's pate, so that my own skull all but tingled, and I wondered if Master Ferrule might not already be seized with the headache. Tremiggan directed me to take a bunch of Ferrule's hair, and seal it by the ends into this hole with wax from a candle I had lit myself. I asked whether what I did to the doll would leave any mark on the man; he said that the most of the time it did not, though sometimes the man bled when the doll was stabbed.

It gave me some little trouble to get Ferrule's hair, but his man trimming the lawyer's beard that afternoon and leaving the sweepings outside the door for maidservant or draughts to sweep away, I picked out enough hairs for a tuft to adorn the doll's head. I might now have waited until all had retired for the night, and practised whatever I wished upon the doll in my own chamber (leaving Ferrule to writhe in his); but wishing to see the thing, determined to try somewhat whilst he read the Will. So I had Bet smuggle it in, all bundled in rags, and slip it to me under the table when we were seated.

Keeping the doll hid beneath the table, I unwrapped it and began by jabbing my thumbnail into its arm.

Ferrule gave no sign of unease, not even to rub his own arm. I applied my nails to the doll's legs, back, chest, head, every part of its body, now with quick stabs, now with slow and prolonged pressure, and still the Lawyer read on in his dry toneless voice.

I twisted a bit of the rag into a thin string, wrapped it twice about the doll's neck, and pulled until I felt the doll quivering in the air between my knees and the table, and held it so through the reading of several small legacies. Ferrule did never so much as cough.

I pulled up the doll's sleeve and rubbed the tip of my thumb back and forth over the arm, briskly, as if I would kindle a spark from it. I soon caught a splinter in my thumb, which made me exclaim and the others look at me. Ferrule remained unaffected.

Explaining that I had caught a splinter from the table, I laid my hand on the top to allay

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suspicion. Ferrule had reached the words in which my father left lands and estate to me along with the title, trusting to my generosity—the one virtue he allowed was in me—to make of me a reasonable lord of the manor. I slipped the doll softly to the floor, where I put my heel upon it and dug.

Ferrule shewed not the least discomfort, but my foot grinding the doll against the floor made a sound which caused all to look again in my direction. I made believe it was a rat, pointing as if it were running to the far end of the parlour, and when all were looking after it, I was able to bend and get the doll again into my hand.

I fell rarely into rages, but was enraged now, and unable to shew it. Beneath the table, however, I had the doll's head in my right hand twisting in one direction and the body in my left twisting in the other, and twisting with all the strength I could put into it without clenching my teeth for all to see. I might as well have saved my energies for all the harm it did Ferrule.

The Will being read at last, and Master Lawyer closing with my father's prayer that all would remember him not too harshly, I stopped twisting and snapped the doll's neck in two. Once more all looked in my direction, Ferrule with the rest, shewing mere natural surprise at the sound, nothing more.

I apologised, saying I had snapped my knuckles, and thrust the pieces of the doll into Bet's lap. I was able to lay aside my complaint against Tremiggan's worthless witchcraft and drink with my guests who had gathered to hear the Will; but when all had retired to their own hearths or bedchambers, and I was left alone with Bet, all my rage returned, driving out of my head the wine I had drunk, or so I thought, though reliving it here, I believe some fumes must have remained to cloud my behaviour.

I demanded of Bet the doll again, and she laid it on the table. The rag clothing was half-off, the limbs twisted on the trunk like some tormented toad, the features, thanks to my heel, now bore less resemblance than a walnut to Ferrule's face, and the head was of course clean separate from the body. Only the tuft of hair remained in place. I had been careful of that, for it should have sealed the witchcraft beyond fail. Yet Ferrule had never even thought a flea was biting him! While my own fingers were speckled thick with splinters of wood.

I made one final effort—I cast the doll into the fire, and watched the flames consume it

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while Bet dug the splinters out of my hands. I still hoped vainly to hear a cry of anguish from Ferrule's chamber. None came, and the doll being crumbled into ash, Bet returned home, and I mounted the stairs to the Lawyer's room to enquire of his health. It was as good as ever it had been in his misbegotten life.

There wanted nothing more to confirm my belief in the fraudulence and falsity of Tremiggan's witchcraft. Unlikeable as was the Lawyer, it would not have been the part of a reasonable man to blame him for not dying, so that all my wrath went out against my cozener. I fetched my sword, hat, outer cloak, and riding boots, went out into the night, and saddled my own horse.

When I reached the place, I tethered my mount to a scraggly tree some fifty yards from Tremiggan's hut and approached on foot, announcing my arrival by kicking open the door.

Tremiggan was squatting at the fire, coughing wretchedly and stirring something in the dirty kettle which was his only cooking vessel.

"Eh!" said he, starting round, "Who be come to see old Jem a'ter dark? Be ye man or de'il?" Perhaps I more closely resembled the latter.

It seemed as cold in the hut as without, so I paused to make the door fast against the wind, a delicate task, since my kick had come near breaking the rusted hinges.

"Young Master?" said he when I turned again. "Ye needed not to bring the cakes this same night. Doesn't 'ee know the de'ils come here and dance of a night?"

"I did not bring your cakes," said I, "and if that doll is all the better your devils can do, I've more to fear from a new-born whelp. From this day I do my work directly on bodies," and I drew my sword.

"Hold on, young Master!" cried Tremiggan. "If so be it didna do as ye wished, there'll be a reason. Let's fetch out the doll."

I replied it was burnt, as I had a mind to burn him, but being a fair-minded man, I would give him time first to look for what excuses he could. I think it was his coughing that softened me this far, as another fit had taken him.

He thanked me most piteously and asked, "But did 'ee plaster in the man's hair, and all?" And learning that I had, he fetched up a sigh which set him coughing again, and begged I would let him finish brewing up his broth of herbs, as that helped soothe his swallow.

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A last request is the right of any condemned man, so I agreed, and while waiting seated myself on his bed of old straw. Perhaps it had been better to have left the door open. His cooking herbs sent forth a strongish odour which, though not unpleasant at first, seemed to cause a strange feeling in me, a lightness of head—unlike that produced by honest liquors—and a sense as of being apart from the scene.

To overcome this, I pulled out my pipe and would have lit it, but found no more of the Indian weed left in my tobacco pouch, so to keep my wits about me, I explained to him in fuller detail how I had prepared the doll.

"Ah," said he, "if 'twere hairs from un's beard as 'ee plastered in the head, might be that as spoiled the charm."

"Don't try to hoodwink me again, old man," said I.

"I be n't trying to hoodwink 'ee, young Master," he pled. "Pity 'tis ye burnt the doll afore we could see what was it went askew."

He searched out from a heap of rags in the corner a cracked jug, which he dipped into the kettle so that I wondered he did not scald his thumb. Before drinking, however, he offered it to me, claiming it was warming as good ale, even if a man had no coughs nor aching in his bones.

Though a witch may have no power to cast charms, he may still be a poisoner (indeed, the Latin *veneficus* has either meaning), and I knew better than to eat or drink anything he offered, even if it had been appetizing. So he swallowed down the half of it, scalding as it was; then, seeing I held an empty pipe, he said he had a bit of fine aged tobacco, flavoured with cloves and wine.

Now I cannot tell what pisky had stolen my wits away to the Moon, but the thought never came to me that tobacco might be poisoned as well as food and drink, and I said I would try the stuff, if it were not too rat-eaten. He pointed it out to me where he had it stored in a hole cut through the end of a low beam above his straw. I dug it out myself, and since it looked and smelt pleasant, filled my pipe and let Tremiggan light it at the fire.

We talked on for a time, he drinking his herbs and I smoking, for I was never one to let anger stand in the way of good conversation. He talked much of vapours, and the parings of nails, the phases of the Moon and pentogramal presences, and the differences between the hair of a man's face and that of his head. I

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understood none of it except that he had made me a doll which did not work; however, the tobacco was indeed pleasant and spicy, both in odour and flavour, and I leant back in the straw and contemplated the empty hole in the beam above me.

There is here a blank in my memory, as of sleep, until I became aware that my eyes were closed, that I was lying at full length in the straw, that there was about my wrists a circle of heat, which in my first waking I took for a serpent, and that my hands were cold as ice.

Opening my eyelids, I found my wrists were bound together with plaited rags drawn up through the hole in the beam so that my arms from the elbow were suspended somewhat above my waist, and my hands, as well as I could see, somewhat purplish and puffy. I lifted them a little to take the strain from my wrists, and began to move my fingers and rub my hands, feeling the cold drain from them, and with it the slight swelling and discolouration. More than this I could not do, for when I tried to sit and examine my bonds more closely, Tremiggan's voice came directing me to lie again.

Turning my head, I beheld him sitting on his three-legged stool before the fire, working over something which he held in his lap. I replied that I did not choose to lie again, on which he held up his Sheffield knife so it glinted in the fire. I took his point; and my peril not as yet seeming great enough to warrant the risk, I lay down again. I thought I should be able to free myself when he was fallen asleep, but realizing he was glancing at me at least as often as I at him, I determined to lie quiet until then, lest he bind me more straightly.

At length Tremiggan rose, set down his work, took his knife and the stub of a dirty candle, and came up behind me.

"Lie still, young Master," said he as I made to twist round and defend myself. "I mean 'ee no hurt."

I felt him take some of my hair, and the shirr of it being cut. He returned to the fire with the hair and the candle, and worked a moment longer, whilst I eyed the knife, which he had left lying just beyond my reach.

Then turning again, back he comes and holds up his handiwork to shew me. It was a doll of myself, my new-cut hair fastened to the head with candle wax.

At sight of it, though I knew his witchcraft was all fraud, yet I was aware of a kind of lump at my heart.

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"Now, young Master," says Tremiggan, "old Jem'll shew 'ee un's witching is good," and I swear there was no malice in the man's voice, but only an eager desire to prove the worth of his powers. And taking a string, he twists it twice round the doll's neck and pulls until the figure is held taut in the air, quivering slightly. And though I knew his witchcraft to be fraud and pretence, yet I felt my own neck tighten until I could neither draw nor release my breath.

I judged it was time Tremiggan be given the margin of doubt, and with an effort choked out that I was convinced. He loosened the string, and I, getting back my breath, began to promise there would be no more talk of burning him. Whether he listened or not I can not say. He was repeating over and over, "Ye see, young Master? Ye see?" and scraping his nail over the doll's breast. Feeling the scraping upon my own flesh, I began to vow he should have double pay for the first doll and triple for the second.

But now I saw I had to deal with a madman. For taking up his Sheffield knife, he says, "Watch 'ee now, young Master. Old Jem'll kill 'ee and bring 'ee back." And stabs the point into the doll's breast, and I feel warm liquid welling up and drenching my linen above my heart.

How he means to bring me back, I do not know.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

If your mentor seldom leads his month's choices with a book of short stories, the custom arises only from convenience in reserving such items for the end. This time, however, we shall begin with a short-story selection whose quality deserves pride of place in any company, despite the backing of three worthy novels.

Best "Thinking Machine" Detective Stories, by Jacques Futrelle, edited by E. F. Bleiler (Dover, $3.00), will be manna for judicious readers. Jacques Futrelle, that one-time journalistic wizard of the Boston *American*, wrote two volumes of brilliantly ingenious tales featuring Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, the Thinking Machine. Georgia-born, New Englander by adoption, our author was still a young man when he died with the *Titanic* disaster in 1912.

As one much influenced by his stories of impossible situations rationally explained, I have often hoped for some reissue. The present ably edited selection contains every favorite, from "The Problem of Cell 13" to others already praised in this column. You will read of impossible murder by illuminating gas; you will read of the phantom motor-car which vanished from a road between stone walls; you will read of miracles not quite so miraculous under Professor Van Dusen's scrutiny.

There are more such adventures, it seems, to be winnowed from old newspapers and magazines. Let's hope that crabbed little scientist will be with us soon again.

Told in the first person by Karl Berger, Stockholm newsman who has bought a fancied horse, Olle Hogstrand's *The Gambler* (Pantheon, $4.95) offers classic detection as well as characters all too human against its vivid background of harness racing in provincial Sweden.

At the track, amid such shady operators as Professional Gambler Svensson or Ring, the pornographic publisher, Karl Berger sees the collapse of a rival's horse touch off arson, suicide, and murder. Who planted the syringe in the cupboard? Relying only

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on Trainer-driver Jan Lindgren and Anette, that shapely siren, Berger feels the grip of some Scandinavian syndicate whose Yugoslav front man coils its tentacles round every vice.

Pressured with sales talk, beaten up by thugs, under police surveillance for aiding Lindgren's hapless brother, our narrator seems lost until after a sensational race C.I.D. Superintendent Krollin nails the murderer with evidence in plain sight. Olle Hogstrand (pronounce *that* one) knows all the tricks.

With *The Highbinders*, by Oliver Bleeck (Morrow, $5.95), we join Philip St. Ives, American go-between for the return of heisted valuables, in a cops-and-robbers caper through half-world London.

The fabled thirteenth-century sword of France's Crusader Saint, King Louis IX, has been stolen from Ned and Norbert Nitry, wealthy British con artists more or less retired. St. Ives must ransom this historic treasure through English Eddie Apex, younger con man representing some mysterious thief unknown.

Careful, now! With a hundred thousand pounds as ransom, with death at every corner, St. Ives dodges snares and booby-traps from graveyard to park to suburban shop. Bloody is the trail, bitter grow frustrations, before he finds St. Louis's sword in a hiding place so ingenious as almost to defy detection, and cars race towards the final shoot-out on Waterloo Bridge. You can trust Ross Thomas, here alias Oliver Bleeck. It's a rip-roaring story.

The London of R. G. Jeffreys's *A Wicked Way to Die* (Walker, $5.95) is London in 1800, its turbulent Age of Reason having overtaken the nineteenth century. Bow Street Runner Jeremy Sturrock, who must not be confused with Bow Street's Blackstone somewhat later, recounts his own exploits unhampered by modesty. He takes charge at once when young Robert Mytton, son of the great banker, is shot to death in an underground room beneath Mr. Sheridan's Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

With Sturrock's foul-mouthed little assistant we move through pub, slum, and palace; we watch a duel in Hyde Park Fields; we visit the original Grub Street as this able if self-satisfied officer untangles the scheming of thieves, cons, and prostitutes.

Though the secret of the locked room can scarcely be called startling or unexpected, we have not seen all the cards in Mr. Jeffreys's hand. Impatience must be restrained until Sturrock halts his quarry that night on the marshes. There, in the mist by the mill pond, one real surprise explodes amid blazing musketry to mark a satisfactory climax and a fitting end.

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Well, the Editor is wrong again. But this time we are glad our tentative prediction has been proved groundless. Isaac Asimov's ninth tale of the Black Widowers Club appeared in the December 1973 issue of EQMM, and in the introduction to the story we wrote that the ninth tale might be the last of the series. Well, Mr. Asimov (who loves to prove an editor wrong!) has decided to keep the Black Widowers Club alive—and we couldn't be more pleased . . .

The guest in this tenth tale is a prolific and successful writer (does that sound familiar?), and he has a small mystery that torments him (and has probably tormented most writers at one time or another). Well, leave it to Henry, the "redoubtable waiter"—but why not be your own detective? Follow the slender thread—the so slender thread!—that leads inevitably, inexorably, to the logical eventuality . . .

WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Thomas Trumbull scowled with only his usual ferocity and said, "How do you justify your existence, Mr. Stellar?"

Mortimer Stellar lifted his eyebrows in surprise and looked around the table at the six Black Widowers whose guest he was for that evening.

"Would you repeat that?" he said.

But before Trumbull could, Henry, the club's redoubtable waiter, had moved in silently to offer Stellar his brandy, and Stellar took it with an absently murmured, "Thank you."

"It's a simple question," said Trumbull. "How do you justify your existence?"

"I didn't know I had to," said Stellar.

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"Suppose you did have to," said Trumbull. "Suppose you were standing before God's great judgment seat."

"You sound like an editor," said Stellar, unimpressed.

And Emmanuel Rubin, host for the evening, and a fellow-writer, laughed and said, "No, he doesn't, Mort. He's ugly but he's not ugly enough."

"You stay out of it, Manny," said Trumbull, pointing a forefinger.

"All right," said Stellar. "I'll give you an answer. I hope that as a result of my stay on Earth I will have left some people a little more informed about science than they would have been if I had never lived."

"How have you done that?"

"By the books and articles I write on science for the layman." Stellar's blue eyes glinted from behind his heavily black-rimmed glasses and he added with no perceptible trace of modesty, "Which are probably the best that have ever been written."

"They're pretty good," said James Drake, the organic chemist, stubbing out his fifth cigarette of the evening and coughing as though to celebrate the momentary pulmonary relief. "I wouldn't put you ahead of Gamow, though."

"Tastes differ," said Stellar coldly. "I would."

Mario Gonzalo, the artist, said, "You don't write only about science, do you? It seems to me I read an article by you in a television weekly magazine and that was straight humor." He had propped up the caricature he had drawn of Stellar in the course of the meal. The black-rimmed glasses were prominent and so were the shoulder-length, fading-brown hair, the broad grin, and the horizontal lines across the forehead.

"Good Lord," said Stellar. "Is that me?"

"It's the best Mario can do," said Rubin. "Don't shoot him."

"Let's have some order," said Trumbull testily. "Mr. Stellar, please answer the question Mario put to you. Do you write only about science?"

Geoffrey Avalon, the patent attorney, who had been sipping at his brandy, said in his deep voice which could, whenever he chose, dominate the table. "Aren't we wasting time? We've all read Mr. Stellar's articles. It's impossible to avoid him. He's everywhere."

"*If* you don't mind, Jeff," said Trumbull. "It's what I'm trying to get at in a systematic way. I've seen his articles and Manny says he has written a hundred-and-something books on all sorts of subjects and the point is why and how?"

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The monthly banquet of the Black Widowers Club was in its concluding phase—the grilling of the guest. It was a process that was supposed to be conducted along the simple ordinary lines of a judicial cross-examination, but it never was. The fact that it so often dissolved into chaos was a matter of deep irritation to Trumbull, the club's code expert, whose dream it was to conduct the grilling in the fashion of a drumhead court-martial.

"Let's get into that, then, Mr. Stellar," he said. "Why the hell do you write so many books on so many subjects?"

Stellar said, "Because it's good business. It pays to be unspecialized. Most writers are specialists; they've got to be. Manny Rubin is a specialist; he writes mysteries—when he bothers to write at all."

Rubin's sparse beard lifted and his eyes widened with indignation behind his thick-lensed glasses. "I happen to have published over forty books, and they're not all mysteries. I've written"—he began ticking off his fingers—"sport stories, confessions, fantasies—"

"Mostly mysteries," amended Stellar smoothly. "Me, I try not to specialize. I'll write on any subject that strikes my fancy. It makes life more interesting for me and I'll never suffer a writer's block. Besides, it makes me independent of the ups and downs of fashion. If one kind of article loses popularity, what's the difference? I write other kinds."

Roger Halsted, the mathematician, passed his hand over the smooth balding forepart of his head and said, "But how do you do it? Do you have set hours to write in?"

"No," said Stellar. "I just write when I feel like it. But I feel like it all the time."

"Actually," said Rubin, "you're a compulsive writer."

"I've never denied it," said Stellar.

Gonzalo said, "But steady composition doesn't seem to be consistent with artistic inspiration. Does it just pour out of you? Do you revise at all?"

Stellar's face lowered and for a moment he seemed to be staring at his brandy glass. He pushed it to one side and said, "Everyone seems to worry about inspiration. You're an artist, Mr. Gonzalo. If you waited for inspiration you'd starve, wouldn't you?"

"Sometimes I starve even when I don't wait for inspiration," said Gonzalo.

"I just write," said Stellar, a bit impatiently. "It's not so difficult. I have a simple,

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straightforward, unornamented style, so that I don't have to waste time searching for clever phrases. I present my ideas in a clear and orderly way because I have a clear and orderly mind. Most of all, I have security. I know I'm going to sell whatever I write, and so I don't agonize over every sentence, worrying about whether the editor will like it."

"You didn't always know you would sell everything you write," said Rubin. "There was a time when you were a beginner and got rejection slips like everyone else."

"That's right. And in those days writing a book took a lot longer and was a lot harder. But that was thirty years ago. I've been secure now for a long time."

Drake twitched his neat gray mustache and said, "Do you really sell *everything* you write? Without exception?"

Stellar said, "Just about everything, but not always first crack out of the box. Sometimes I get a request for revision and if it's a reasonable request, I revise, and if it's unreasonable, I don't. And once in a while—once or twice a year, I think—I get an outright rejection." He shrugged. "It's part of the free-lance game. Can't be helped."

"What happens to something that's rejected, or that you won't revise?" asked Trumbull.

"I try to sell it somewhere else. One editor might like what another editor doesn't. If I can't sell it anywhere, I put it aside; a new market might open up; or I might get a request for something that the rejected article can fill."

"Don't you feel that's like selling damaged goods?" said Avalon.

"No, not at all," said Stellar. "A rejection doesn't necessarily mean an article is bad. It just means that one particular editor found it unsuitable. Another editor might find it suitable."

Avalon's lawyer-mind saw an opening. He said, "By that reasoning it follows that if an editor likes, buys, and publishes one of your articles, that is no proof the article is any good."

"None at all, in any one case," said Stellar, "but if it happens over and over again, the evidence in your favor mounts up."

Gonzalo said, "What happens if *everyone* rejects an article?"

Stellar said, "That hardly ever happens, but if I get tired of submitting a piece, chances are I can cannibalize it. Sooner or later I'll write something on a subject that's close to it, and then I incorporate parts of the rejected article into a new

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piece. I never waste *anything.*"

"Then everything you write sees print, one way or another. Is that right?" And Gonzalo shook his head slightly, in obvious admiration.

"That's about right." But then Stellar frowned. "Except, of course," he said, "when you deal with an idiot editor who buys something and then doesn't publish it."

Rubin said, "Oh, you've run into that? The magazine folded?"

"No, it's flourishing. Haven't I ever told you about this?"

"Not as far as I remember."

"I'm talking about Bercovich. Did you ever sell anything to him?"

"Joe Bercovich?"

"Are there likely to be two editors with that last name? Of *course*, Joe Bercovich."

"Well, sure. He used to edit *Mystery Story Monthly* some years ago. I sold him a few stories. I still have lunch with him occasionally. He's not in mysteries any more."

"I know he isn't. He's editing *Way of Life Magazine*—one of those fancy new slicks that appeal to the would-be-affluent."

"Hold it. Hold it!" cried out Trumbull. "This thing's degenerating. Let's get back to the questioning."

"Now, wait," said Stellar, waving his hand at Trumbull in clear annoyance. "I've been asked a question as to whether everything I write sees print and I want to answer that because it brings up something I'm pretty angry about and would like to get off my chest."

"I think he's within his rights there, Tom," said Avalon.

"Well, go ahead, then," said Trumbull discontentedly, "but don't take forever."

Stellar nodded with a sort of grieved impatience and said, "I met Bercovich at some formal party. I don't even remember the occasion for it, or very much about who was involved. But I remember Bercovich because we did some business as a result. I was there with Gladys, my wife, and Bercovich was there with his wife and there were six or eight other couples. It was an elaborate thing.

"In fact, it was very elaborate, and deadly. It was formal. It wasn't black tie; they stopped short of that; but it was formal. The serving was slow, the food was bad, the conversation was dull. I hated it. —Listen, Manny, what do you think of Bercovich?"

Rubin shrugged. "He's an editor. That limits his good points, but I've known worse. He's not an idiot."

"He isn't? —Well, I must

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admit that at the time he seemed all right. I had vaguely heard of him, but he knew me, of course."

"Oh, of course," said Rubin, twirling his empty brandy glass.

"Well, he did," said Stellar indignantly. "It's the whole point of the story that he knew me, or he wouldn't have asked me for an article. He came up to me after dinner and told me that he read my stuff and admired it, and I nodded and smiled. Then he said, 'What do you think of the evening?'

"I said cautiously, 'Oh, well, sort of slow,' because for all I knew he might have been the hostess' lover and I didn't want to be needlessly offensive.

"And he said, 'I think it's a bomb. It's too formal and that doesn't fit the American scene these days.' Then he went on to say, 'Look, I'm editor of a new magazine, *Way of Life*, and I wonder if you'd write us an article on formality. If you could give us, say, three thousand words, that would be fine. You could have a free hand and take any approach you want, but be light-hearted.'

"Well, it sounded interesting and I said so, and we discussed price a little, and I said I would try and he asked if I could have it in his office in two weeks or sooner and I said maybe. He seemed very eager."

Rubin said, "When was all this?"

"Just about two years ago."

"Uh-huh. That was about the time the magazine started. I look at it occasionally. Very pretentious and not worth the money. I never saw your article, though."

Stellar snorted. "Naturally you didn't."

"Don't tell me you never wrote it," said Gonzalo.

"Of course I wrote it. I had it in Bercovich's office within a week. It was a very easy article to do and it was good. It was lightly satirical and included several examples of stupid formality at which I could fire my shots. In fact, I even described a dinner like the one we had."

"And he rejected it?" asked Gonzalo.

Stellar glared at Gonzalo. "He didn't reject it. I had a check in my hands within another week."

"Well, then," said Trumbull impatiently. "What's all this about?"

"He never printed it," shouted Stellar. "That idiot has been sitting on it ever since, for nearly two years. He hasn't published it, he hasn't even scheduled it."

"So what," said Gonzalo, "as long as he's paid for it?"

Stellar glared again. "You

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don't suppose a one-time sale is all I'm after, do you? I can usually count on reprints here and there for additional money. And then I publish collections of my articles; and I can't include that one until Bercovich has published it."

"Surely," said Avalon, "the money involved is not that important."

"No," admitted Stellar, "but it's not utterly unimportant either. Besides, I don't understand why the delay. He was in a hurry for it. When I brought it in he slavered. He said, 'Good, good. I'll be able to get an artist on it right away and there'll be time to do some strong illustrations.' And then nothing happened. You would think he didn't like it; but if he didn't like it, why did he buy it?"

Halsted held up his coffee cup for a refill and Henry took care of it. Halsted said, "Maybe he only bought it to buy your good will, so to speak, and make sure you would write other articles for him, even though the first one you wrote wasn't quite what he had wanted."

Stellar said, "Oh, no. —Manny, tell these innocents that editors don't do that. They never have the budget to buy bad or unsuitable articles in order to buy good will. Besides, if a writer turns out bad articles you don't want his good will. And what's more, you don't earn good will by buying an article and then burying it."

Trumbull said, "All right, Mr. Stellar. We listened to your story and you'll note I didn't interrupt you. Now, *why* did you tell it to us?"

"Because I'm tired of brooding over it. Maybe one of *you* can figure it out. Why doesn't he publish it? Manny, you said you used to sell to him. Did he ever kill anything of yours?"

"No," said Manny, after a judicious pause. "I can't recall that he did. —Of course, he's had a bad time, you know."

"What kind of bad time?"

"This dinner took place two years ago, you said, so that was his first wife you met him with. She was an older woman, wasn't she, Mort?"

Stellar said, "I don't remember her. That was the only time we ever met."

"If it were his second wife, you'd remember. She's about thirty and very good-looking. His first wife died about a year and a half ago. She'd been ill a long time, it turned out, though she'd done her best to hide it. She had a heart attack and it broke him up. He went through quite a bad period there."

"Oh! Well, I didn't know about that. But even so, he's married again, right?"

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"Sometime last year, yes."

"And she's a good-looking person and he's consoled. Right?"

"The last time I saw him, about a month ago—just in passing—he looked all right."

"Well, then," said Stellar, "why is he still not publishing my article?"

Avalon said thoughtfully, "Have you explained to Mr. Bercovich the advantages of having your article published?"

Stellar said, "He *knows* the advantages. He's an experienced editor."

"Well, then," said Avalon, just as thoughtfully. "It may be that on second reading he found some serious flaw and feels it is not publishable as it stands. Perhaps he's embarrassed at having bought it and doesn't know how to tell you."

Stellar laughed but without humor. "Editors don't get embarrassed and they're not afraid to tell you. If he found something wrong on second reading he'd have called me and asked for a revision. I've been asked for revisions often."

James Drake said, "And this editor never asked for any revision at all?"

"No!" said Stellar explosively, and then almost at once he added, "Well, once. One time when I called to ask if it were scheduled—I was getting pretty edgy about it by then—he asked if it would be all right if he cut it a little, because it seemed diffuse in spots. I asked where the hell it was diffuse in spots, because I knew it wasn't, and he was vague and I was just peeved enough to say no, I didn't want it cut. He could print it as it was, or he could send it back to me."

"And he didn't send it back to you, I suppose," said Drake.

"No, he didn't. Damn it, I offered to *buy* it back. I said, 'Send it back, Joe, and I'll return the money.' And he said, 'Oh, come, Mort, that's not necessary. I'm glad to have it in my inventory even if I don't use it right away.' Damn fool. What good does it do either him or me to have it in his inventory?"

"Maybe he's lost it," said Halsted, "and doesn't want to admit it."

"There's no reason not to admit it," said Stellar. "I've got a carbon—two carbons, in fact. Even if I wanted to keep the carbons—and they come in handy when it's time to collect material for a book—it's no problem these days to get copies made."

There was a silence around the table, then Stellar's brow furrowed and he said, "You know, he did ask once if I had a carbon copy. I don't remember when. It was one of the more

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recent times I called him. He said, 'By the way, Mort, do you have a carbon copy?'—just like that, 'By the way,' as if it were an afterthought. I remember thinking he was an idiot; does he expect a man of my experience *not* to have a carbon copy? I had the notion, then, that he was getting round to saying he had mislaid the manuscript, but he never said a word of the kind. I said I had a carbon copy and he let the subject drop."

"Seems to me," said Trumbull, "that all this isn't worth the trouble you're taking."

"Well, it isn't really," said Stellar, "but the thing *bothers* me. I keep careful files of my articles; I've got to; and this one has been in the 'To be published' file for so long I can recognize the card by the fact that its edges are dark from handling. It's a sort of irritation. —Now why did he ask me if I had a carbon copy? If he'd lost the manuscript, why not say so? And if he hadn't lost it, why ask about the carbon?"

Henry, who had been standing at the sideboard, as was his custom after the dinner had been served and the dishes cleared away, said, "May I make a suggestion, gentlemen?"

Trumbull said, "Good Lord, Henry, don't tell me that this nonsense means something to you!"

Henry said, "No, Mr. Trumbull, I'm afraid I no more understand what it's all about than anyone else in the room. It merely strikes me as a possibility that Mr. Bercovich may have been prepared to tell Mr. Stellar that the manuscript was mislaid—but perhaps only if Mr. Stellar had said he had no carbon. It might have been the fact that Mr. Stellar *did* have a carbon that made it useless for Mr. Bercovich to lose, or, possibly, destroy the manuscript."

"*Destroy* it?" said Stellar, in high-pitched indignation.

"Suppose we consider what would happen if he published the manuscript, sir," said Henry.

"It would appear in print," said Stellar, "and people would read it. That's what I *want* to happen."

"And if Mr. Bercovich had rejected it?"

"Then I would have sold it somewhere else, damn it, and it would still have appeared in print and people would have read it."

"And if he returned it to you now, either because you refused to make revisions or because you bought it back, then again you would sell it somewhere else and it would

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appear in print and be read."

"Damn right."

"But suppose, Mr. Stellar, the editor bought the article, as he did, and does *not* publish it. Can you then sell it elsewhere?"

"Of course not. It's not mine to sell. *Way of Life* has bought first serial rights, which means they have the full and sole right to publish it before any other use is made of it. Until they publish it, or until they formally relinquish the right to do so, I can't sell it anywhere."

"In that case, Mr. Stellar, does it not seem to you that the only conceivable way in which Mr. Bercovich can keep the article from being generally read is to do exactly what he has done?"

"Are you trying to tell me, Henry," said Stellar, with incredulity in his voice, "that he doesn't *want* it read? Then why the hell did he ask me to write it?"

Henry said, "He asked you to write *an* article, sir. He did not know the exact article you would write till he read it. Isn't it possible that once he read the article you *did* in fact write, he realized he didn't want it read and therefore took the only action possible to keep it unpublished. He probably did not expect you to be the kind of writer who would hound an editor over such a matter."

Stellar spread his hands, palms upward, and looked about at the faces of the Black Widowers in a kind of semi-humorous exasperation. "I never heard of anything so ridiculous."

Avalon said, "Mr. Stellar, you don't know Henry as we do. If this is his opinion, I suggest you take it seriously."

"But why should Joe want to destroy the thing or bury it? It's a perfectly harmless article."

Henry said, "I merely advance a possible explanation for what has gone on for two years."

"But yours is not an explanation that explains, Henry. It doesn't explain *why* he wants the article to be left unread."

"You had said, sir, that he asked for permission to cut the article a little and you refused. If you had agreed, he would perhaps have changed it so as to render it really innocuous and then he would have published it."

"But wnat did he want cut?"

"I'm afraid I can't say, Mr. Stellar, but I gather that *he* wanted to do the cutting. That may have been in order not to call your attention to the precise passage he wanted cut out."

Stellar said, "But if he made

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the cuts himself, I'd still see what he had done once the article appeared."

Henry said, "Would you be likely to read the article once published and compare it sentence by sentence with the original manuscript, sir?"

"No," admitted Stellar reluctantly.

"And even if you did, sir, there might be a number of changes and you would have no reason to suppose that one change was more significant than the others."

Stellar said, "You know, this is a more peculiar mystery than the first, Henry. What could I have written that bothers him?"

"I can't say, Mr. Stellar," said Henry.

Avalon cleared his throat in his best lawyer-like manner and said, "It is rather a pity, Mr. Stellar, that you didn't bring a carbon copy of your manuscript with you. You could have read it to us and perhaps we could then spot the critical passage."

Stellar said, "Who thought this sort of thing would come up?"

Gonzalo said eagerly, "If your wife is at home, Mr. Stellar, we might call her and have her read the article to Henry on the phone. The club can afford the expense."

Henry seemed to be lost in thought. Now he said slowly, as though the thinking had surfaced but was still a private colloquy, "Surely it couldn't be anything *im*personal. If the tenets of good taste had been broken or if the policy of the magazine had been violated, he would have seen that at once and asked for specific changes. Even if he had bought it after a hasty reading and then discovered these impersonal errors afterward, there would have been no reason for him to hesitate to ask for specific changes. Could it be that some superior officer in the publishing firm had vetoed the article and Mr. Bercovich is embarrassed to tell you that?"

"No," said Stellar. "An editor who isn't given a free hand by the front office is very likely to quit. And even if Bercovich didn't have the guts to do that, he would be only too glad to use upstairs interference as an excuse to return the manuscript. He certainly wouldn't just hold on to it."

"Then," said Henry, "it must be something personal; something that has meaning to him, an embarrassing meaning, a horrifying or frightening meaning."

"There's nothing of that kind in the article," insisted Stellar.

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"Perhaps there is no significance in the passage to you or to anyone else, only to Mr. Bercovich."

"In that case," interrupted Drake, "why should Bercovich care?"

"Perhaps," said Henry, "because if attention were called to it, it *would* have significance. That is why he dared not even tell Mr. Stellar which passage he wanted cut out."

"You keep inventing perhapses," muttered Stellar. "I just don't believe it."

Gonzalo said abruptly, "*I* believe it. Henry has been right too many times before and I don't hear anyone suggesting any other theory to account for the fact that the article hasn't been published."

Stellar said, "But we're talking about nothing. What is the mysterious passage that is bothering Joe?"

Henry said, "Perhaps you can recall some personal reference, since that is what we suspect it would have to be. Didn't you say that included in your article was an account of a dinner similar to the one that inspired Mr. Bercovich to ask for the article in the first place?"

"Aha," said Gonzalo. "*Got* it! You described the dinner too accurately, old boy, and the editor is afraid the host will recognize it and be offended. Maybe the host is an old and valued friend of the publisher and would get the editor fired if the article appeared."

Stellar said, with no effort to hide his contempt, "In the first place, I'm an old hand at this. I don't write anything either actionable or embarrassing. I assure you I masked that dinner so that no one could reasonably see a resemblance. I changed every major characteristic of the dinner and I used no names. Besides, if I had slipped and made the damned thing too real, why shouldn't he tell me so? That sort of thing I would change in a shot."

Henry said, "It might be something even more personal. He and his wife were at the dinner. What was it you said about them?"

"Nothing!" Stellar shouted. "Do you suppose I would make use of the editor to whom I was submitting the article? Give me that much credit. I didn't refer to him under any name or any guise, didn't refer to anything he said or did at all."

"Or anything about his wife either, sir?" asked Henry.

"Or about his wife—well, wait, she may have inspired one small section in the article, but of course I didn't name her or describe her. The section was entirely insignificant."

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Avalon said, "Nevertheless, that may be it. The memory was too poignant. She had died and he just couldn't publish an article that reminded him of—of—"

Stellar said, "If you're about to finish that sentence with 'the dear departed,' I'll walk out. That's tripe, Mr. Avalon. With all respect—no, without too damn much respect—that's tripe. Why wouldn't he ask me to take out a sentence or two if it aroused too keen a memory? I would have done it gladly."

Avalon said, "Just because I phrase the matter in sentimental terms, Mr. Stellar, doesn't mean it can't have significance all the same. His failure to mention it to you might be the result of a certain shame. In our culture such things as sorrow over lost love are often made fun of. *You've* just made fun of it. Yet it can be very real."

Stellar said, "Manny Ruben said she died about a year and a half ago. That means at least half a year *after* I wrote the article. Time enough to have it printed by then, considering his eagerness to have me meet a quick deadline. And it's been a year and a half since and he's married a beautiful woman. Come on, how long does one sorrow over a lost love after one has found another?"

"It might help," said Henry, "if Mr. Stellar could tell us the passage in question."

"Yes," said Gonzalo, "call your wife and have her read it to Henry."

"I don't have to," said Stellar, who had only with difficulty withdrawn the wounded stare he had been directing at Avalon. "I read the damn thing again a couple of weeks ago—about the fifth time—and it's still fresh in my mind. What it amounts to is this: we had been served the roast at a kind of snail's pace and I was waiting for others to be served before beginning. A few weren't quite that formal and were already eating. Finally, I broke down and salted my portion and was going to eat when I noticed that Mrs. Bercovich who was on my right had still not been served. I looked surprised and she said she had a special request and it was delayed in getting to her, so I offered her my plate and she said, no, thank you, it's been salted. I told that passage, without names, just so I could get across a funny line which I remember exactly. It went, 'She was the only one at the table who objected to the salt; the rest of us objected to the meat. In fact, several of us scraped off the salt, then ate it instead of the meat."

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No one laughed at the funny line.

Halsted said, "I certainly don't see anything sentimental in that."

"I should say not," said Stellar, "and that's the only mention of her, without name or description, and none at all of Joe himself."

Henry said, "Yet Mr. Rubin said that the first Mrs. Bercovich died of a heart attack, which is rather a catch-all reference to circulatory disorders in general. She may well have had seriously high blood pressure and been put on a low-salt diet."

"Which is why she refused Stellar's salted meat," said Gonzalo. "Right!"

"And why she was waiting for a special dish," said Henry. "And this is something to which Mr. Bercovich desperately wants no attention drawn. Mr. Rubin said Mrs. Bercovich had done her best to hide her condition. Perhaps a few people knew she was on a low-salt diet."

Stellar said, "Why should Joe care if they know now?"

"I must introduce another perhaps, sir. Perhaps Mr. Bercovich, weary of waiting and perhaps already attracted to the woman who is now his second wife, took advantage of the situation. He may have salted her food surreptitiously, or, if she used salt substitute, he may have replaced it, at least in part, with ordinary salt, or with—"

"Poisoned her, you mean?" interrupted Avalon.

Henry shook his head. "Who can tell? She might have died at the same moment anyway. He, however, may feel he contributed to her death and may now be in panic if anyone finds out. The mere mention of a woman refusing salt at that table may, in his eyes, be a shrieking clue to his guilt—"

Stellar said, "But I didn't name her, Henry. There's no way of telling who she was. And even if somehow one were to find out that it was she, how could anyone suspect Joe?"

"You are perfectly right, Mr. Stellar," said Henry. "The only reason we have come to suspect Mr. Bercovich now is because of his peculiar behavior with respect to the article and not to anything in the article itself. But, you know, we have Biblical authority to the effect that the wicked flee when no man pursueth."

Stellar paused a moment in thought, then said, "All this may be, but it's not getting my article published." He pulled out a black address book, then looked at his watch. "I've called him at his home before and it isn't ten yet."

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Avalon raised his hand in an impressive stop sign. "One moment, Mr. Stellar. I trust you are not going to tell your editor about what we've said here. It is all strictly confidential in the first place, and it would be slander in the second. You would not be able to support it and you may get yourself into serious trouble."

Stellar said impatiently, "I wish all of you would take it for granted that an experienced writer is aware of what libel and slander are. Is there a telephone handy, Henry?"

"Yes, sir," said Henry. "I can bring one to the table. May I also suggest caution?"

"Don't worry," said Stellar as he dialed. He waited a moment, then, "Hello, Mrs. Bercovich? This is Mort Stellar, one of the writers for your husband's magazine. May I speak to Joe? —Sure, I'll wait." He did not look up from the telephone as he waited. "Hello, Joe, sorry to call you at home, but I've been going over that piece of mine on formality. You don't have it scheduled yet, do you? —Well, Joe, I've decided you can shorten it if you want to. —Oh, sure, that's all right. —No, Joe, just a minute, I don't want you to do it. I've got some things I *want* cut out and maybe that will satisfy you. —For instance, that line I have about eating the salt instead of the meat really isn't funny, now that I think of it. —Yes, that's right. Suppose I cut out that part about the woman refusing the salted meat. Will you publish it if I cut that out?"

There was a pause at this moment and now Stellar looked up at the others, grinning. Then he said, "All right, Joe. Sure I can do it. How about eleven tomorrow morning? —Okay, see you then."

Stellar looked complacent. "It hit him right between the eyes. He repeated the line to me, word for word. You can't tell me that he remembered that passage, in an article he bought two years ago, right off the top of his head, unless it had special meaning to him. I'll bet you're right after all, Henry . . . Well, I'll cut it. The important thing is that I'll get my article into print."

Avalon frowned and said with heavy dignity, "I should say that from the standpoint of public morality, the really important thing is that a man may have tried to kill his wife and may even have actually done so and will get away with it."

Trumbull said, "Don't get upset about it, Jeff. If Henry is right, then there's no way of proving that he did anything, or

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if he did tamper with the salt that it actually contributed in any way to her death. So what is there to do? In fact, what do we have to do? The really important thing is that Stellar has done it all. He's given the man two solid years of agony — by writing the article in the first place, and then by nagging him constantly to publish it."

Henry said, "The really important thing, sir, may be that Mr. Bercovich will, as a result of all this, be discouraged from attempting a similar experiment in the future. After all, he has a second wife now, and he may grow tired of her too."

CRIMINALIMERICK

IN VINO OBSCURITAS

by D. R. BENSEN

Black Widowers frequently find
That the guest they have lavishly dined
Has a problem that few
Can quickly think through,
For they also have lavishly wined.

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a *NEW* crime story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

We all know the meaning of the phrase, "the eternal triangle"—husband, wife, and a lover. But surely there is "the eternal quadrangle"—husband, wife, and two lovers. Was this the situation in which Raymond Gray, an out-of-work, has-been actor, found himself? Even though one "angle" of the four-sided triangle was dead?

Another of Christianna Brand's unputdownable studies of people enmeshed in love, hate, greed, malice—and murder . . .

CLEVER AND QUICK

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

You had to keep up appearances; so the apartment was very showy, everything phony right down to the massive brass fender in front of the electric fire. But keeping up appearances was one thing and keeping up the payments was another; and with the theater as it was these days, both of them had been "resting" for a long, long time. So the fact was that they really ought to let Trudi go.

Trudi was the *au pair* girl and for different reasons neither one wanted her to go.

They were having a row about it now, standing in front of the fireplace. They had a row on an average of once an hour these days—nag, nag, bloody nag. Colette was driving Raymond out of his mind. And now this thing about Trudi. If he secretly (somehow) made up Trudi's pay? He suggested, "Try offering her a bit less for the work."

"*You* try offering her a bit less—for the pleasure," said Colette.

It touched him as ever on the raw. "Are you suggesting—?"

"Raymond, that girl thinks of nothing but money and you know it."

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Yes, he knew it, and with the knowledge his heart grew chill. If a time came when he could no longer give Trudi presents— He was mad about her—a little, sharp-eyed, shrew-faced mittel-European—and yet here he was, caught, crazy for her, helpless in the grip of her greedy little claws. He, Raymond Gray, who all his life had been, on stage and off, irresistible to women, now caught in the toils of a woman himself. If I were slipping a bit, he said to himself, if my profile were going, if my hair and my teeth weren't so perfect as once they were—but he was wearing marvelously well. Why, even that drooling old monster in the opposite apartment—

She was not a monster, though she was a big woman and, having once been something of an athlete, now found all the fine muscle running to flabby white fat. But drooling? She was disgusting, she thought, out of her mind—a fat, ugly, aging widow, sitting here drooling over a has-been matinee idol not much more than half my age.

But, as he was caught and helpless, so was she—caught and helpless, sitting there like a silly schoolgirl, yearning only to pop out to her balcony and see if, through his window, she could catch a glimpse of him. From her room she could not see into his; the apartments were not in fact opposite each other but across a corner, at the same level.

But she dared not venture forth. The plane trees in the street just below were in full pollination and if she so much as poked out her nose, her allergy would blow up sky high. And even just passing in the corridor, going up and down in the elevator, he mustn't see her — with streaming red eyes and nose.

She spent a good deal of time in the corridors and the elevator. "Oh, Raymond," she would cry, "fancy running into you again!" She had long ago scraped up an acquaintance and it was Raymond, Colette, and Rosa between them now. They were not unwilling—her place was rich in champagne cocktails and dry martinis, with lots of caviar on little triangles of toast. She was loaded.

Colette said so now. "Can't you wangle something out of the old bitch over there? She's loaded, and if you'd so much as kiss her hand she'd chop it off and give it to you, diamond rings and all."

Her hand was like a frog's back, all speckled with the greeny-brown patches of aging skin. "All the same, I'll tell you something," he said. "If you

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were out of the way, damn nagging so-and-so that you are, she'd make me a ruddy millionaire, I swear she would."

"Yes and where would your precious Trudi be then? Because," said Colette nastily, "I don't think dear Rosa would put up with very much of *that* little load of fancy tripe."

"Don't you call Trudi names!" he shouted.

"I'll call her what she is. I'm entitled to that much, surely?"

She had a vile mind, a vile mind and a foul mouth to express what was in it. It flashed across him in a moment of hazy light, red-streaked, that once he had loved her—never dreaming that behind the façade lay this creature of venom and dirt, never dreaming that one day he would stand here with upraised hand, would lunge forward and strike out at her, would have it in his mind to silence her forever.

But his hand did not touch her. She stepped back and away from him, tripped over the rug on the polished floor before the fireplace, fell heavily, almost violently throwing herself back and out of his reach. A brief shriek, arms flailing, a sickening scrunch as the base of her skull hit the rounded knob of the heavy brass fender. And suddenly—stillness.

He knew she was dead.

Trudi stood in the doorway, then moved forward to him slowly. She said, "Is all right. I saw. You did not touch her." And she fumbled for the English word. "Was—accident?" She came close beside him, standing there, staring down "But she is dead," she said.

She was dead. He had not touched her, it had been an accident. But she was dead—and he was free.

It took him a little while to accept that Trudi was not going to tie up her life with an out-of-work, has-been actor, free or not free. "But, darrleeng, you know that your money all is gone, soon I must anyway leave. Mrs. Gray she has told me so." And since Mrs. Gray was lying there dead on the floor and could not contradict, she improvised a hurried tally of the debts already owing to her. "And this I must have, Rraymond, soon I go home if I have no more a job here."

To be free—to be free to marry her and now to lose her! He pleaded, "Don't you love me at all?"

"But of course! Only how can we marry, darrleeng, if you have no money to live? So this money I must have, to go home."

"You can't go yet, anyway. You'll have to stand by me

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about—her." He had almost forgotten the poor dead thing lying there, ungainly, at their feet. "You'll have to give evidence for me."

She shrugged. "Of course. Was accident. But then I go home."

"Leaving me here like this? Trudi, I have no wife now, no money—"

The little shrug again, so endearing to his infatuated heart, half comic, half rueful; the wag of the pretty little head toward the window across the corner. "As to wife, as to money—over there, plenty both."

He said quickly, "Then I should be rich. So you and I—?"

But she said, as a few minutes earlier Colette had said, "I don't think Mrs. Rosa Fox puts up with nonsense. I think she suddenly pulls the money-bags—tight."

Did the idea come to him all in a flash as it seemed at the time?—or was there an interval while he thought?—while he stood over his wife's dead body and carefully, deliberately, thought it all through to the end? All he knew afterward was that suddenly he had Trudi by the arm, was talking to her urgently, pulling her to kneel down beside as, very delicately, he scraped from the round brass knob of the fender a fleck of the blood so rapidly congealing there, smearing it over the round brass knob of the poker, the knob identical in size, covering the smears with his own hand. And finally he threw the poker back into the fireplace.

"Now, Trudi, slip out, don't let anyone see you. Buy something somewhere. Come back right away and this time let the porter see you."

He did not look back, as he scrambled to his feet, at the still sprawled body—he had not even that moment to spend on the past. The future was now ahead of him. Only, he prayed, as he furtively slid out into the corridor, let Rosa be in! And let her be alone!

She was in and alone. She was always in and alone these days, flopped in an armchair, dreaming like an adolescent girl of her hopeless, her helpless, love. "A woman of my age," she thought, "sitting here mooning over another woman's husband." But she'd been quite a gal in her day and widowed a long, long time. Now she said, "Raymond—how lovely!" And at once, "But what's the matter, my dear? Are you ill?"

"Rosa," he said, "you must help me!" And he fell on his knees before her, grabbing at her skirt with shuddering

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hands—really, with all that talent it was quite extraordinary that he couldn't get more work! He threw a hoarse quaver into his voice. "I've killed her," he said.

She stepped back and away from him. "Killed her?"

"Colette. I've killed her. She went on and on. She said horrible things about—about you, Rosa. She thinks you—she always said that you—Rosa, I know you've liked me—"

"I love you," she said simply; but she took a deep, deep breath while the future spread out before her—as earlier his own had opened out to him. His wife was dead and he was free.

He pretended amazement at her answer—amazement and gratitude; but he was too clever to claim immediately a return of her feeling. He came at last to the point. "Then, even more, Rosa, may I dare to ask you what I was going to. I am throwing myself on your mercy, just praying that out of friendship you will help me. And now, if you really mean that you—"

And he went with her to the sofa and sat there gripping her hands and poured it all out to her. "She was being so vile. She had—well, she's dead, but Colette had a filthy mind, Rosa. She'd been going on like this for weeks and suddenly I couldn't stand it any more. I saw red. I—I picked up the poker. I didn't mean to harm her—honestly, I swear it—just to frighten her. But when I came to myself again—" And he prayed, "Oh, my God, please try to understand!"

"You did this because she was saying foul things about *me*?"

"You've always been so nice to us, Rosa; it just made me sick, her talking like that, sneering and jeering." And he poured it all out again, living through the scene, only substituting her name for Trudi's. Her big plain face went first white, then scarlet, then white again. She held tightly to his hand. "What do you want me to do?"

"Rosa, I thought very quickly—I do think quickly when I'm in a spot. It seems awful now, her lying there dead and me just thinking of myself, trying to fight my way out of it. But that's what I did. And then I knelt down and—well, there are two brass knobs on the fender exactly like the one on the poker and I—I moved her head so that it looked as though she'd hit it against one of the fender knobs, and then I cleaned all the—the blood and stuff off the poker—"

She was a clever woman—quick and clever. The body

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might have slowed down, the body that once had been so strong and under control, but the mind was still clever and quick. "An accident," she said.

"Yes, but—people knew we were always quarreling. Trudi must have known it, of course. They could say I'd pushed her, given her a shove." He gave her a sick look that was not too difficult to assume. "At the least—manslaughter," he said.

Clever and quick. "You want me to say that I *saw* what happened? That you didn't hit her?"

"My God," he said, "you're marvelous! Yes. You could say you saw it all through the window, saw me standing there talking to her, say frankly that we seemed to be arguing, make it look as though you're not too much on my side, just a casual neighbor. And then—there's a rug there, you know it, very silky and slippery—you skidded on it once yourself, remember? Perfectly possible for her to have taken a backward step, slipped and fallen backward; and of course that would be all you'd know—you can't see down to the floor of our room, even from your balcony."

"But I'd have to say I was out *on* the balcony. I can't see your window from in here."

He had thought that out too. "Your balcony's only overlooked by two flats, and all those people will have been out; I know them. No one could say that you *weren't* there."

"All right," she said.

"You'll do it for me?"

"Of course. But what about that girl, that little trollop, whatever her name is—the *au pair*?"

He could hardly keep the stiffness from his voice but he controlled himself. "Out shopping, thank God!" And thank God, also, that Rosa couldn't in fact have been on the balcony, looking in, seeing Trudi there in the room with him. He knew all about the allergy, and one glance at her face confirmed it—Rosa hadn't been out.

"Well, go back now. You must call a doctor quick. And say nothing about me. Just tell your story, don't seem even to think of bringing me into it. They'll be round here soon enough, asking if I saw anything. Now, time's passing, you really must go."

He started for the door but suddenly he paused. "Rosa!" He had assumed a look of shame but over the shame a flush of exultancy. "Rosa, it's awful to have even thought of it, but suddenly it's come to me. A trial for murder! You know how things are in the theatrical business, you know how things have been with me

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lately. But if I were suddenly in the news! Accused of murder—standing there at the Old Bailey, headlines in all the papers, a *cause celebre!* And then—the dramatic intervention, the witness who'd seen it all, the last-minute evidence." He stood before her, half shame-faced, half pleading. "Rosa?"

"Why didn't I give evidence before? They'd never even have charged you if I'd spoken at once."

"Well, that's the point. I *must* get myself arrested and tried. You'd have to say you hadn't realized, you didn't want to get mixed up in it. But then of course the moment you heard I was accused—"

"Even so you wouldn't get further than the first hearing, whatever it's called. No publicity in that."

"You couldn't—just be abroad for a little while, out of touch?"

She opened her mouth to say that none of it mattered, he'd never need to work again. But she held her peace. He was an actor, actors needed to work, they had to express themselves. "Leave it all to me. I'll handle it," she said.

The earlier headlines were not too bad though hardly sensational and then came the long dull period before the trial opened. However, at last—the day. Himself in the dock, very pale, very handsome. The police in the witness box. "Accused stated—" A flipped-over page in a notebook. "Accused stated, 'Oh, my God, this is awful, I must have hit out at her, I must have had a blackout, she was nag nag nag at me the whole bloody time because I wasn't getting work, but I never meant to harm her, I swear I did not.'"

And the forensic evidence. "On the head of the poker I found a small smear of blood." The smear had been consistent with the blood of the dead woman, with having come there at the time of her death. Tests showed that the accused had handled the poker after the blood came there. Yes, consistent with his having attempted to remove marks of blood with the palm of his hand, missing the one small smear. The blade of the poker appeared to have been wiped—it showed no fingerprints.

In reply to defense counsel: Yes, it was true that the blade of a poker would not be much handled in the ordinary way and the wiping might well have been simply the previous routine cleaning. The doctor testified that the woman had been dead between half an hour

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and an hour when he saw her.

Trudi in the box for the defense: shrewd and cool. Had arrived back from the shoppings to find Mr. Grray on his knees beside the body; had had almost to lift him to his feet. Yes, he might very well have touched the poker with his hand, made bloody by his examination of the wound; his arms were all over the place as she hauled him up. She had trried to get him calm; wanted to call a doctor but did not know the number of him, and Mr. Grray seemed so dazed she could not get no sense from him. And anyway, what was the hurry, said Trudi with one of her shrugs. Anybody could see that Madame was dead.

And so at last to Rosa Fox. She had with extraordinary dedication deliberately shed all aids to such doubtful charms as she possessed—stripped off the jewelry, dressed herself drably, sacrificed the cosmetics which ordinarily, to some extent at least, disguised the ravages of her age. Not for one moment could anyone suspect that here stood a woman with whom the prisoner could ever have had the slightest rapport.

Into the agreed routine. The casual acquaintance, the occasional drink together. The questioning of the police directly after the—accident. Agreed she had previously insisted she had seen nothing. She had been unwell, under great private tensions, wanted only to get abroad to a health spa where she had been ever since. She hadn't wished to become involved. Never dreamed, of course, that there could possibly be any charge against Mr. Gray, knowing as she did with absolute certainty that the thing had been entirely an accident. Because in fact she had actually seen it happen.

"From my balcony you can look straight into their room. I glanced over and saw them standing there. They seemed to be having an argument. He said something angry, she jerked away from him as though he had raised his hand against her—"

"Mrs. Fox, had he anything in his hand?"

"In his hand? Oh, the poker you mean? No, nothing, no poker or anything. And anyway, he never raised his hand."

"He never raised his hand? You can swear to that?"

The Judge from the Bench said solemnly, "Mr. Tree, she *is* swearing to that. She is swearing to everything she says. She is under oath."

"Well, I could see it all quite clearly and I certainly can swear—well, I mean I am absolutely sure he never raised

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his hand at all. He said something. She stepped back and then she seemed to trip and topple over backwards. I thought to myself, 'Oh, she's skidded on that rug of theirs!' I know that rug—very treacherous it is on the parquet floor. I nearly slipped on it once myself. Well, and then I went back into my room and thought no more about it."

"It didn't occur to you that she might have injured herself?"

"I thought she might have banged her head or something but of course no more than that. As I say, I'd slipped there myself and been none the worse for it." And she made a little face and admitted that if the lady had collected a couple of bruises it would have been no more than she deserved. "I think she nagged him. But of course I didn't know them well."

Headlines, yes. But not much really and often not even on the center pages, let alone the front page. But there was a big picture of him planned for Sunday, with an interview—celebrating, a glass of champagne raised to the neighbor whose testimony had confirmed his innocence. Not perhaps in the best of taste, the picture taken right there in front of the fireplace where his wife had died. But it wasn't a best-of-taste newspaper and one settled for what one could get.

And the reporters withdrew; and at last they were alone in his apartment. She held out her hands to him. "Well, Raymond?"

She looked about a hundred years old standing there before him, the sagging face devoid of its makeup, the ugly dull dress, the droopy hairdo, the mottled hands without their customary diamond flash. She revolted him.

"Well, Rosa, you did a beautiful job."

She did not hear the chill in his voice, or did not believe it. She said softly, "And one day soon—shall I collect my reward?"

"Reward?" he said.

"After all, my darling, I have perjured myself for you."

"Yes, so you have, haven't you?" he said.

Now the unpowdered skin took on a strange ashen color, and her eyes grew frightened and sick. "Raymond, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you perjured yourself, as you say; and you know, perhaps, what happens to perjurers?"

A clever woman, quick and clever. But still she insisted, "I don't understand."

"I need money, Rosa," he said.

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"Money? But if we were married—"

He moved aside so that she looked over his shoulder and into the mirror above the fireplace. He said, "You? And *I? Married?*"

She looked long, long at her pitiful reflection. She said at last, "Is this blackmail?"

"Wasn't it blackmail when you thought that by saving me from prison you could force me to marry you?"

"Yes," she said. "I think perhaps it was." And she thought to herself that now she was beaten at her own game. "If you give me away," she said, "you'll have to admit you murdered her."

"In fact I didn't murder her. I can say it happened almost exactly as you said in court."

"Very well then," she said swiftly, "I can change my story. Who can prove that I didn't see you murder her?"

"*I* can prove that you didn't see it. You couldn't have been out on your balcony. The plane trees were pollinating and anyone will confirm to the police what happens if you so much as open a window when the pollen's flying about. But when they first saw you, you showed no traces of any allergic reaction. I know, because I'd just seen you myself.

"Besides, they couldn't touch me. I've been 'put in peril,' as they say—*autre fois acquit* is the legal name for it. Once acquitted I can't be tried again for the same crime. I could shout from the housetops that I'd killed her and still be safe."

"And live with that reputation?"

"Well, of course I *wouldn't* say I'd been guilty—which anyway, as I keep telling you, I wasn't. I'd still claim it had been an accident. But *you* would be in the soup."

"I see." She pondered it long and carefully, still staring, but unseeingly now, at her sad reflection in the glass. "You thought all this out from the very first, didn't you? In detail, from the very first?"

"Quite a nice little bit of opportunism," he suggested, proud of it.

"All that about the publicity? The blood deliberately smeared on the poker? Yes, I see. You had to give them something, you had to get yourself accused and charged, you had to be tried and acquitted before it was safe to accuse me. Two purposes to my perjury: first to supply the evidence that would set you free and second to make me vulnerable to blackmail." She said almost curiously, almost as though she were humbled for

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him rather than for herself, "Did you never even like me?"

"I didn't mind you," he said indifferently. "But as for marrying you—I think I'm a trifle more particular than that." And he picked up her handbag, helped himself to the thick wad of bank-notes there, stuffed them loosely into his wallet, tucked the wallet away. "Just a very, very small beginning, my dear," he said.

"I won't even ask how much you're demanding. You'll be back again and again and again of course, won't you? But by way of a start—?"

"Make it ten thousand," he said. "You can get that much quickly." He smiled at her with cruel and ugly triumph. "And I need it quickly—for my honeymoon," he said.

Clever and quick. Clever not even to have to ask the name, to have summed it all up in one bright intuitive flash. And quick. The poker with its round brass knob lay there on the fender. She snatched it up—and struck.

Trudi burst open the door, darted forward from her listening post, slowed, then came smoothly the rest of the way and knelt beside him. For what seemed a long, long time they both stared down as only a few short months ago Raymond Gray himself had looked down at the dead body of his wife. It was his turn now.

Rosa's fat white arms retained something, it seemed, of their once splendid muscle; long-ago anatomical training had suggested the most susceptible spot. The heavy ball of the poker had smashed to a cobweb of fractures Raymond's delicate temple bone.

Trudi moved. With a small sick grimace she shifted Raymond's head a little way, so that the wound lay crushed against the round brass knob of the fender.

"That rrug!" she said, getting up to her feet again. "Always so dangerous! Fancy, a second time, just the same like the poor wife!" She grinned with brutal complacence into the heavy white face with its look of dead despair. "So lucky that this time *I* was present, to see that it all was again just a terrible accident."

Raymond's jacket had fallen open. She stooped and with fastidious fingers picked out the wad of notes and stuffed them into her apron pocket.

"Just a verry, verrry small beginning," she quoted and took the poker out of Rosa's inert hand. "Go back to your flat, Madame. Collapse upon your bed. I see to everything, then I make telephone to the

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doctor." The Trudi shrug. "This time I know the number of him."

Rosa went back to her own apartment. She did not, however, collapse upon her bed.

"Police?" she said, holding the telephone receiver in a steady hand. She gave Raymond Gray's address. "You'd better get over there quick. I've just seen from my balcony the *au pair* girl, going for him with the poker. And this time—no question of an accident."

She listened with a satisfied smile to a sharp voice cracking out orders. The voice returned to her. "Well, I wouldn't know about that—I can't see to the floor of the room. The girl disappeared from sight for a bit and when she got up she was stuffing money into her apron pocket. You'll find it, I daresay, hidden somewhere in her room. An affair going on, you know, even before the poor wife died; and now I suppose he was refusing to marry her."

"Q"

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Even though Interpol never investigated crimes for the French government, this crime was of such a delicate nature and had so many dangerous international implications that an exception was made. And naturally Interpol, with its headquarters just outside of Paris, could not refuse.

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INTERPOL: The Case of the Musical Bullet

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The Air France flight from Paris to Shanghai left twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, and these days it was usually crowded. Travel to the world's most populous city had increased, not for the usual tourist reasons but simply because there was money to be made in trade with China.

Thus the flight, especially in the first-class section, was made up almost exclusively of gray-suited businessmen from Common Market countries, their attaché cases full of samples and price lists. It was the last Monday in March, and though spring had come early to Paris this year there was still a dampness of winter about the field at Orly as the big jet taxied out to the far end of the runway for takeoff.

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One man, sitting alone with a vacant seat beside him, had taken a small battery-operated tape recorder from his case and was dictating into it, speaking rapidly in French. His voice was low and the other passengers paid no attention. The plane had been waiting ten minutes at the end of the runway for clearance to take off when the stewardess, for want of something better to do, decided to check the passengers' seat belts one more time. As she passed the first-class seat occupied by the man with the tape recorder, she noticed him slumped over, apparently asleep.

"Sir," she said in French, touching his shoulder, "is your seat belt fastened?"

He slumped a bit farther in his seat, and she drew a quick breath. Calmly she walked to the front of the plane and knocked on the cockpit door. When the flight officer opened it she said, "You'd better go back to the gate. We have a dead man on board. I think he's been shot."

When Sebastian Blue was seated in the Secretary-General's office on the top floor of Interpol headquarters, he often found time to study the little art objects and memorabilia that cluttered the room. Just now, while the Secretary-General took a call from some nameless official of the French government, Sebastian had an opportunity to run his fingers over a gray-white ashtray carved from rock by a Canadian Eskimo. He was just wondering how it might have arrived there when the Secretary-General hung up the phone.

"That was more of the same," he told Sebastian. "The Brider case."

"I must say that two calls from the French government are enough to stir anyone's interest. I'm eager to hear the details."

The Secretary-General cleared his throat and let his fingers play casually with the Eskimo ashtray. "You must realize that this is an extremely delicate affair for Interpol, Sebastian. Our headquarters are here in France, just outside Paris, but we have no connection with the French government. We are not Scotland Yard, we are not the Sûreté Nationale. We never investigate crimes for the French government."

"Of course not."

The Secretary-General spread his hands. "The French government has asked us to investigate a crime."

"Oh?"

"More specifically, they have asked *you* to investigate a crime."

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Sebastian Blue registered his surprise. It was less than a year since he'd left his position at Scotland Yard and joined Interpol. Though he'd had a few notable successes during that time, he had no reason to believe the French government even knew of his existence. "Me?" he asked, somewhat incredulously.

A nod. "They've heard you're an expert in all sorts of airline crimes. They need you on a case which may have international significance. I cannot turn down the French government—but needless to say you'll be on detached service from Interpol during the investigation."

"The Brider case?"

"Yes. You may have read the bare details. A man was shot to death in the head on an Air France jet late yesterday as it was preparing to take off for Shanghai. His name was Pierre Brider and he was a civil servant holding a somewhat unique position in the French government. He acted as the liaison man with various foreign governments arranging joint space shots and satellite launchings."

"I didn't realize there was such a person. But what's so special about his death?"

"He died, Sebastian, at the beginning of a flight to China. Although the French government refuses to discuss the nature of his mission even with me, I think it's reasonable to assume that he was going to negotiate a joint French-Chinese space project. In any event, the government wants it kept quiet, and they want his murder solved as quickly as possible."

"That shouldn't be difficult. Has the weapon been recovered?"

The Secretary-General shook his head. "It seems there wasn't any weapon—couldn't have been any weapon."

"He was shot, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well then, there had to be a gun."

"Remember the anti-sky-jacking precautions? Orly is as strict as American airports. Passengers are checked with metal detectors, all carry-on baggage is searched. No gun could have been taken on board that plane. And even if one was, how do you shoot someone on an airliner without anyone knowing it? The stewardess swears the seat next to him was unoccupied all the time they were taxiing for takeoff."

"Interesting," Sebastian admitted.

"Damned interesting."

"Can I use Laura to help me?"

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"Laura Charme? You two have functioned quite well as a team, but we can't really spare her for this. Unless," he smiled slightly, "you find a special need for her talents."

Sebastian Blue nodded. "I'll keep it in mind."

Orly—Aeroport de Paris-Orly—reminded Sebastian of all the other airports he'd ever seen. It reminded him particularly of London's Heathrow, although pilots had told him the two were nothing alike in the arrangement of their landing strips. Still, for Sebastian on this chilly Tuesday morning, there were similarities to be found everywhere—in the shops and the corridors, and especially in the mixture of languages he heard on all sides.

After speaking to the police and the airport security guards, he was introduced to Shana O'Neill, the Air France stewardess who had discovered the body. She was a bright pretty girl who wore her brown hair pulled back so that it didn't obscure the freshness of her face. In some ways she reminded him of Laura, but perhaps it was only youth that the two had in common.

"You're Irish?" he asked, keeping up with her rapid pace along the corridor to the gate.

"Mostly. But I haven't been back to Dublin since I was a child. I lived in London for a time and then came on to Paris."

"So did I."

She slowed her pace as they approached the anti-skyjacking checkpoints. Like most American airports, the corridor was blocked by a white arch-like metal detector through which passengers had to walk. Purses, brief cases, and carry-on luggage were inspected separately. Sebastian watched the procedure for some moments and commented, "It seems thorough enough."

"Believe me, it is."

A uniformed airport employee stood beyond the archway, watching the wavering needle on the metal detector. Sebastian walked through and the man immediately stopped him. "What's that on your waist, sir?"

Sebastian opened his coat to show the holstered gun. He rarely carried it these days, but he'd brought it today specifically to test out the device. "Pretty good," he admitted. "But suppose I disassembled it and scattered the pieces around my body. Once I was on the plane I could reassemble it and use it."

The man at the machine explained patiently. "This can be adjusted for sensitivity. If it

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was turned up too high you might get through at some airports, but in fact we keep it sensitive enough to detect even the coins in your pocket."

Sebastian nodded approval. "Let's look at the aircraft, Shana."

She led the way through the gate and down the covered ramp to the field. "This is where the passengers boarded yesterday," she said. "After I discovered he was dead, the plane returned here and the passengers were transferred to another plane. They were searched, of course, but no weapon was found."

"And now they're scattered over half the world," Sebastian observed sadly. "How am I expected to solve this one? And quickly too!"

The stewardess grinned broadly. "I heard the French detective say you were once the best in the business on airline crimes. He said you'd been with Scotland Yard."

"That was a long time ago." Only a year, but a long time nevertheless. Before his divorce, before he'd come to Paris to start anew at the age of 49. "But I'll want to see the plane. Where is it?"

"In the hangar. The airline is anxious to get it back in service, of course, but they agreed to hold it long enough for your inspection. Not that you'll find anything, of course. The local police have already been over it."

"Nevertheless, a detective must always inspect the scene of the crime."

He followed her up the steps and into the giant jet plane. The first-class section was toward the front, with seats two abreast, and he paused at the seat she pointed out. "He was here, by the window."

"The seat next to him was unoccupied?"

"Yes."

"What about behind him, and across the aisle?"

"Those seats were occupied, but the people saw and heard nothing unusual."

Sebastian grunted and bent to examine the seat more closely. "Is this blood?"

"It could be, but he didn't bleed much. The police said it was a small-caliber bullet. Anywhere but in the head and it might not have killed him."

"Were you the only stewardess in first class?"

"There was another girl, but she was in the galley opening the champagne."

"Oh?"

"We serve it to first-class passengers only," she explained. "The flight was a bit late taking off, so she had started opening the bottles."

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"Then you were the only crew member out here when the killing took place?"

"That's correct. I'd noticed the passenger—Mr. Brider—dictating into a small tape recorder. A few moments later he was dead, and I told our captain about it at once."

"Is the rest of the crew here?"

She shook her head. "They took the flight out as scheduled, using another plane. I stayed behind because I had found the body and the police wanted to question me further."

Sebastian straightened up. There was nothing to be found on or under the seat. "Did you know the dead man? Ever see him before?"

"Never."

"What about the rest of the crew? Was there any evidence they knew him?"

"None that I saw. You certainly can't think one of us shot him?"

Sebastian Blue shrugged. "He was killed with a gun. All passengers and carry-on luggage were searched for guns—both before and after the crime. No gun was found. But crew members aren't searched before boarding, are they?"

"No," she admitted slowly. "But everyone, including the crew, was searched afterwards and nothing was found."

"There are many places to hide a gun on a plane this big, and a crew member would know them all."

"I'm sorry you think that. We're not in the habit of murdering our passengers."

They left the plane and walked back to the terminal building. Sebastian suggested a cup of coffee, but Shana O'Neill declined. Her manner had turned suddenly cool since his suggestion that the plane's crew might be involved.

He left her and went back to the airport security office. Duvivier, the French detective assigned to the case, was still there, talking to the airline people. "Did you find anything?" he asked Sebastian, his manner showing that he expected a negative response.

"Perhaps. The stewardess says he was dictating into a small tape recorder just before he died. Do you have it?"

"Of course." Duvivier produced the recorder from his attaché case. It was a popular Japanese model, with Pierre Brider's name printed on the case. "Perhaps the Interpol man can find something we missed," he said with a touch of sarcasm. "Perhaps the tape recorder is rigged to fire a bullet into the speaker's brain."

"Stranger things have hap-

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pened," Sebastian said. He slipped off the back to inspect the battery, transistors, and self-contained speaker. Obviously the workings hadn't been tampered with. He switched it on and listened to the dead man's voice speaking quickly in French. The language was still a bit new to Sebastian, and he could catch only scattered phrases. "What's he saying?"

"Listing his itinerary in China. We've been over it and so have the government people. His secretary listened to it when she came to identify the body. No clue there."

But then, with the suddenness of a punctuation, the voice was interrupted in mid-sentence by a series of musical tones. They lasted perhaps two seconds and then there was a grunt from Pierre Brider. Then silence.

"What was that?" Sebastian asked.

"We don't know. None of the passengers or crew remember hearing it."

"Almost as if he'd been shot with a musical bullet."

The detective chuckled. "Is that the best Interpol can come up with? A musical bullet!"

"I'll try to work on something better," Sebastian said. His eyes strayed to the morning newspaper in Duvivier's case. A dim blurred photograph of Brider stared out from beneath a headline that read: *Official Slain on Mystery Mission.* So the press was already suspicious. Sebastian turned back to the French detective and said, "Let me keep this tape recorder for a bit."

"The government man wanted it when we finished."

"I'm investigating for the government. And we're far from finished."

Laura Charme was young enough to be Sebastian's daughter, and lovely enough to be his wife. In the year they'd known each other he'd often fantasized both possibilities, though he knew in his heart that each was impossible.

"I'm glad you came by," she said to him now, relaxing over a cup of coffee in the employee lounge. "It's all over the building that you're on detached service with the French government—some sort of special assignment."

"It's not all that special, simply a tough egg that no one can crack. Don't know if I can either. It's that man who was killed on the airliner at Orly yesterday."

"Pierre Brider?"

He nodded. "The Secretary-General said I could use you if I needed to."

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Her face brightened like a flower opening to the sun and he realized that she'd been brooding about being left out. "And you need me?"

He produced the tape recorder. "Brider was dictating into this when he was shot. I want you to translate it for me."

"You should know French by now, Sebastian." But she took the tape recorder and switched it on. Pierre Brider's voice spoke again, running through the itinerary of his journey. Laura began simultaneous translation. " 'March 27th: I'm flying from Paris to Shanghai on Air France. This is my first time on a plane bound for the Orient. It's the regular Monday flight; arriving in China on Tuesday their time. My first contact will be with Dr. C. Z. Yen, director of the Chinese Space Institute. During the meetings which follow I will explore the possibilities of cooperation between France and the People's Republic of China on the launching of a communications sat—' "

The voice broke off in mid-word, and Sebastian heard again the musical tones, followed by the dying man's grunt.

"What do you make of it?" he asked Laura. "I suggested a musical bullet, but the police didn't think much of the idea."

"He was actually dictating this at the moment of death?"

"Yes."

"But someone must have seen or heard the shot fired, Sebastian!"

"It was a small-caliber bullet, probably a .22. And the gun could have been equipped with a silencer."

"A silencer would have made it that much more bulky and hard to conceal."

"True," he granted. "Any suggestions?"

She thought about it. "Have you talked to the passengers on the jet?"

"They're all gone. The police couldn't hold them after the initial questioning and search. Only the stewardess who found the body is still in Paris."

"And Brider's secretary?"

"What?"

"Brider's secretary. He must have had one to transcribe this tape. Was she traveling with him?"

"No," Sebastian answered, and then realized he'd spoken too quickly. "At least I don't think so. He was seated alone and I assumed he was traveling alone. But Duvivier did mention his secretary coming to identify the body."

"Perhaps I'd better check on it," Laura said, and Sebastian knew she was on the case,

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whether the Secretary-General fully approved or not.

Pierre Brider had worked in a building on the Rue de Temple, not far from the National Archives. Laura found his office without trouble, and asked to see his secretary. Presently a short pale girl appeared in the reception area.

"I'm Clare Bonwell," she said quietly. "I was Monsieur Brider's secretary."

Laura nodded sympathetically. "I dislike bothering you at such a time, but there are some questions to be answered. We want very much to find the killer of Monsieur Brider."

"I understand."

"Do you have any idea who might have shot him yesterday?"

"No, none. Everyone liked him."

"Was he traveling to China alone?"

The question seemed to surprise her. "Yes, of course."

"He was dictating into his tape recorder at the time of his death."

"He always did that when he traveled. I transcribed the tapes when he returned home."

"Could I see his office?"

The girl hesitated, then said, "Certainly. Follow me."

They passed through a room lined with computers and another where a number of girls worked at identical desks. "Is this work all connected with the French space program?" Laura asked.

"Yes, though we work mainly through other countries. There have been a number of joint launchings with the United States."

She opened the door to a medium-sized office overlooking the Ile-de-la-Cité and Notre-Dame Cathedral. The office told Laura little about the man who had been killed except that he had been scrupulously neat. The only object on the desk now was a small clock in the shape of Notre-Dame.

"Not much here," Laura conceded. "Tell me about the man, his family, his friends."

"Pierre was divorced long ago. I believe his former wife is now living in America. There were no children, and his only relative is a brother in the south of France. The body is being shipped there for burial."

"Any girl friends?"

The pale girl blushed. "I could not answer that. I never concerned myself with my employer's personal life."

"The French government is your employer."

"But Monsieur Brider was my immediate superior." She glanced nervously at her watch. "It's almost four and I have

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much work to do. If you'll let me show you out?"

Something about the girl bothered Laura, but she could not put her finger on it. She allowed herself to be shown out just as Brider's clock began to chime the hour. Outside she crossed the street to a small café and sat down at an empty table. She lit a cigarette and ordered a glass of red wine, remaining seated by the window where she had an excellent view of the entrance of the building she had just left.

When Clare Bonwell emerged shortly after five o'clock, Laura followed her.

Sebastian Blue found the man he sought only after some difficulty. The Chinese mission to Paris was notable for its coolness toward outsiders, and even the thaw in relations with the United States had done little to improve their hospitality. Thom Ying was an important man in the delegation, though one would never know it from his pained expression and subdued manner. He greeted Sebastian in the sitting room of the embassy building, dressed all in black and with a small white kitten in his arms.

"I am happy to be of service to Interpol, if I can," he said, speaking in a quiet voice that seemed to wash gently over the listener.

"I'm working with the local police and the French government on this," Sebastian explained. "It's a bit outside Interpol's usual activities. I understand you arranged for Brider's trip to China. Is that correct?"

"I arranged it, yes. We had hoped it would lead to improved relations between our two countries. Naturally we didn't want word of the visit to leak out until there was something substantial to report."

"Was there any opposition to the visit among your people?"

"There is always opposition to contact with the west," he answered with a shrug. "But happily it is growing less important with the passing years. We are learning that we need each other."

Sebastian watched his fingers move gently over the kitten's fur. "Then you have no idea who might have killed him?"

Thom Ying sighed. "I have many ideas, but none that would prove helpful to you, I fear."

"I'd be interested in hearing them anyway."

"There are people who oppose any sort of easing of tensions between east and west.

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To them Pierre Brider might have appeared an enemy."

"Name me some names."

"Are you familiar with the League of St. George? They imagine themselves to be dragon killers—China killers, if you will."

"I may have heard of them. And how could they have killed Brider?"

"A bullet does not always need a gun."

"What does that mean?"

Thom Ying shrugged. "You are the detective."

Sebastian got to his feet. "Yes, I am. And I should be about my business. Thank you for the help."

As he left the embassy building and walked quickly across the street to his car, he had the strong feeling that Thom Ying's eyes were still watching him.

Clare Bonwell lived in a little walkup apartment on the fringe of the Latin Quarter. Laura Charme had followed her on foot across the Seine and down the narrow, uncertain streets to the building, and now she wondered just why she had come. Was it any more than the vaguest sort of hunch?

After fifteen minutes of standing in the chilly March darkness she had about decided to go home when a small German car pulled up before the apartment. As soon as she saw the man who emerged from it, that same intuition told her to stay where she was. He entered the building and emerged after a few moments with Clare Bonwell at his side. They got into the little car and started off, leaving Laura in a panicky search for a taxi to follow them.

She found one finally, just as their car was disappearing around a corner. Instructing the driver quickly in French, she settled back to watch their progress. The car ahead, out of sight for a moment, came back into view as they rounded the corner into the Boulevard Saint Germain. Soon the taxi had narrowed the gap between them to a single block.

"Let me off here," she said suddenly to the driver, seeing the car ahead pull into a parking space.

Clare Bonwell and her male escort had already disappeared through a doorway. Laura followed close behind, more certain than ever that she was on the track of something connected with Brider's killing.

She stepped through the doorway and came face to face with Clare Bonwell. "That's the girl from Interpol!" the secretary said.

Laura sensed a movement in

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the shadows at her side, and shot out her arm in a defense position to meet the attack. The man came on, but off balance from her jab he went down hard on the dusty floor. "I have a gun here," Laura announced. "Please stay where you are."

The League of St. George was not nearly as difficult to locate as Sebastian Blue had imagined it would be. Far from being any sort of secret society, the League maintained offices within two blocks of the Arc de Triomphe, on the Avenue Marceau.

It was late in the day when Sebastian reached the office, and he found only one man in attendance, an elderly fellow with wisps of white hair standing out from an otherwise bald head.

"You've come about the League's business?" the man asked. "I'm sorry my secretary isn't in today."

Sebastian glanced at the covered typewriter and noted the accumulation of dust. He guessed the secretary hadn't been in for many days, if indeed there was a secretary. "I was told the League might be helpful in my investigations."

"Which are?" The old man moved his head sideways to listen with his good ear.

"I'm looking into the murder of Pierre Brider."

"I see."

"My name is Sebastian Blue. Would you be the name on the door—Georges Titre?"

A slight bow of the head. "Yes. I am the Director of the League."

"And its purpose?"

"To oppose any sort of relations with Communist China. To slay the dragon, sir!" The old eyes flashed.

"Were you aware of Pierre Brider's mission to mainland China?"

"Of course."

"It wasn't reported in the press."

A shrug of the old shoulders. "We knew, nevertheless."

"Is it possible that you might have wanted to stop this mission, to sabotage Chinese-French cooperation on a satellite launching?"

"Yes, it is possible."

"And you might have killed Brider to do it?"

The old man raised his tired eyes. "But we would have no reason for killing Pierre Brider. He was one of us—he was a member of the League!"

Clare Bonwell faced the gun that Laura held firmly and said, "Be careful with that thing. I don't want to get shot."

Laura backed up a step and

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the fallen man struggled to his feet. "Where'd you learn that little trick, Miss?" he asked with something like admiration in his voice.

"I'm asking the questions," Laura said. "Why did you try to attack me?"

"I thought you were attacking us. You followed us in here."

She could barely make out his features in the dim light of the hallway, but he was a Frenchman of indeterminate middle age. She had probably stumbled onto nothing more sinister than an illicit love affair. "Who are you? What's your name?"

He drew himself up. "I am Louis Croire, a friend of the young lady. No further identification is necessary. We are on our way to my apartment upstairs."

"Please, Louis," the girl said, her voice close to a sob. "I don't want trouble."

Laura drew a deep breath and put away her pistol. "All right, go on. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

They went on up the stairs, almost gratefully, and Laura Charme left. She walked for two blocks, deep in thought, before she hailed a taxi and gave the driver the suburban address of Interpol headquarters.

Surprisingly, a light was burning in Sebastian's office when she arrived. She found him at his desk, poring over a list of names and addresses. He looked up as she entered. "What luck?"

"All bad. I talked to the secretary and got nowhere. She was in the habit of transcribing his tapes after he returned from a journey. I saw his office, and later I followed the girl home."

"You followed her?"

Laura nodded. "Call it a hunch, nothing more. A man picked her up and they went to his apartment. I had a little tussle with him in the front hallway."

Sebastian Blue sighed. "Sometimes you're too fast with that judo and karate. Was he hurt badly?"

Laura chuckled and dropped into the chair opposite his desk. "He could walk. A petty love affair, I suppose. A married man with a second apartment in the city. It happens all the time in Paris." She dug into her purse and came out with a cigarette.

"You smoke too much," Sebastian said.

"I know. What's that list for?"

"The membership of the League of St. George, a rather seedy organization headed by an old man named Georges

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Titre. Their headquarters is in a dusty little office on the Avenue Marceau."

"We've come a long way from that jet plane."

"Not so long as you might think. Thom Ying suggested the League as a possibility. The League is very much anti-Chinese."

"Enough to kill Brider?"

"Believe it or not, he was a member! Inactive, but still a member. Georges Titre gave me the latest membership list to prove it."

"And all those people belong?"

"The list is four years old, and there are only a hundred and seventy-six names on it. Hardly another Christian Democrats Party."

"Why are you checking it?"

"To see if any members besides Brider were passengers on that jet airliner."

"Wouldn't they use phony names?"

"That's difficult to do when you're traveling outside the country and need a passport. The airliner's first stop was Istanbul."

She watched him going down the list of names, comparing it with the passenger list furnished by Air France. "When you finish that, remind me to tell you about the clock, Sebastian."

"Which clock?"

"The one on Pierre Brider's desk, in his office. It's a replica of Notre-Dame Cathedral."

"What's so special about it?"

"Well, I suppose it was because of the clock that I followed Clare Bonwell home, though I'll admit I don't exactly see her connection with it."

"Oh?" He looked up from the list, interested now.

"It was almost four, and I had the feeling she was hurrying me out of the office before the clock chimed. And I heard it start to chime as I reached the hall."

"Why would she do a thing like that?"

"It chimed different musical tones—like the Cathedral bells, I suppose. And it sounded like the musical bullet on that tape recording."

Sebastian Blue's face went blank. He simply stared at her, deep in thought. Then he brought out the tape recorder again and played Pierre Brider's last words. "Was that it?" he asked softly when the tape had ended.

"I think it was, Sebastian. I think it was Brider's office clock chiming. But how could that be?"

"I don't know," Sebastian admitted.

"Unless—unless this *isn't* the

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tape recorder Brider was dictating into! Unless a switch was made after his death!"

"The passengers and crew were all searched, remember? A tape recorder would be more difficult to hide than a gun. And certainly an identical machine with the dead man's name on it would be noticed."

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"There's another possibility, though it's a remote one."

"What?"

"Let me think about it first."

"Are you thinking about how he was shot too?"

"Duvivier phoned with some information about the bullet. A standard .22 short, but without rifling marks on it. That gives me an idea how it was done."

"You *are* being mysterious tonight, Sebastian!"

"Let me finish checking this list first."

"Looking for anyone special?"

He nodded. "The man who occupied the seat directly across the aisle from Brider. But he's not listed as a League member." Sebastian tossed the list aside with a disappointing sigh. "I was hoping."

"What's his name?"

He consulted the passenger list again. "Louis Croire."

"Croire! That's the friend of Brider's secretary, the man I tangled with tonight!"

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure—they're at his apartment right now!"

Sebastian got quickly to his feet. "Phone Duvivier at this number and give him the apartment address. Tell him to meet us there with police."

"You think it's the murderer?"

"We're going to find out."

They were at the apartment in ten minutes, but there was no sign yet of Duvivier. "Should we wait?" Laura asked.

"No. We're going up. Come on."

Louis Croire's apartment was on the second floor. Clare answered the ring and saw Laura. "Are you back again?"

Sebastian's shoulder hit the door, knocking the secretary out of the way. Then he was inside the apartment, with Laura close behind. Louis Croire came out of the bedroom, carrying a suitcase in one hand. "A fast trip back from China?" Sebastian asked.

Croire dropped the bag and went for his gun. He had it out, almost pointing at them, when Sebastian drew his own weapon and fired twice. The Frenchman toppled backward over his suitcase as the bullets struck.

"I think you killed him,

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Sebastian," Laura said, catching her breath.

"It was no time for fancy shooting. Watch the girl!"

Clare Bonwell had made a move toward the door, but now she stopped, stunned, and stared down at Croire's body. Outside, Duvivier's police car was pulling up in front of the building.

"So it was Croire who killed Pierre Brider?" Laura asked.

"No," Sebastian answered.

"No!" Laura looked blank. "Then who *did* kill Brider?"

Sebastian sighed. "At this point you'd have to say that I killed him. You see, the man on the floor is the real Pierre Brider."

Duvivier turned the metal tube over in his hand. "I don't understand," he said to Sebastian. "An automatic pencil?"

"A metal tube made to look like an automatic pencil by the addition of a pocket clip and the mechanism from a real pencil. Brider—or Croire—still had it in his pocket."

"He shot someone with *this*?" Laura asked. They were in Duvivier's office, down the hall from where Clare Bonwell was being questioned. It was late, but Sebastian had resigned himself to a long night.

"Once on board the jet he assembled it into a deadly little zip gun—not unlike those used by teen-age gangs. This tube became the barrel, fastened to a wooden grip with tape. The firing pin was probably a nail. A man after some practice would assemble it behind his newspaper in a matter of minutes. The metal parts, including the bullet, were inside this tube. The wooden grip and tape were in another pocket, since they wouldn't set off the metal detectors."

"And afterwards?" Duvivier asked. "The passengers were searched."

"The weapon could be disassembled just as quickly. The tape could be balled up and left in the ashtray. The nail and trigger could be stuck into the seat upholstery, the wooden grip left in the overhead baggage rack. Only this metal tube, the barrel, had to be carried off, because the powder burns inside it would quickly identify it as the weapon. And Brider hoped the mystery over the method of murder would keep us too busy to bother much about the victim. It was the best misdirection he could manage, and it almost worked. I suspected a weapon like a zip gun when you told me there were no rifling marks on the bullet. Zip guns usually have smooth barrels, but they're still effective at short range."

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"And no one heard the shot?" Laura asked.

"Muffled by a newspaper, a .22 would sound no louder than a popping champagne cork—and remember, they were popping at the time."

"All right," the detective agreed. "But what told you Brider was still alive and had killed someone else in his place?"

Sebastian settled back in his chair. "I hadn't a hint of it until earlier tonight, when Laura told me about the chiming clock in Brider's office. That was our musical bullet, and it proved that Brider had dictated earlier, *not* on the plane. Yet Brider spoke on the tape of being on the plane, so whatever deception was involved, he was a part of it. And why would Brider sit there pretending to dictate notes that had really been recorded hours or even days before?

"One possibility presented itself—the tape had to be prerecorded because the man pretending to speak to it was *not* Brider, and his voice was nothing like Brider's. Was such a substitution possible?

"The answer was yes. Brider had no family except a supposed brother in the south of France who quickly claimed the body for burial. His secretary identified it, you'll remember. And who was to question the identity? The man died wearing Brider's clothes, carrying Brider's passport, holding Brider's tape recorder. His secretary identified the body, his superiors listened to his taped voice. There was no need for anything like a fingerprint check."

"But what about that passport?"

"I imagine we'll find poor likenesses in the case of both men. They were the same age and general appearance, which was all that mattered. Brider's secretary deliberately furnished a blurred photo to the newspapers—a picture so blurred it satisfied Brider's friends and the airline crew. It could have been either man."

"And the brother who claimed the body?"

"Nonexistent, I'm sure. They couldn't risk anyone else viewing the body. It had to be shipped away quickly."

A detective knocked and entered the office. "Clare Bonwell is making a statement," he said.

They went down the hall to listen to her.

"It was all his idea," she said, speaking softly and without emotion. "I wanted him to marry me and he said he would if I helped him with this. He had two motives for killing

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Louis Croire—first to sabotage the China mission by publicizing it, and second to make himself some money in the process. He already knew Croire, an unemployed journalist living on the income from a family trust fund. They were the same age and general appearance, and that fact undoubtedly suggested the scheme to Pierre.

"He told Louis of his China mission, pretending to fear the press might find out. He suggested they change identities and leave Paris on the same plane. Louis, posing as Pierre, would leave the flight at Istanbul to throw the press off the track. The real Pierre would fly on to Shanghai. Louis agreed to help, after a promise that he'd get an exclusive on the eventual story."

"What about the tape recorder?" Duvivier asked.

"Pierre told him to carry it and pretend to be dictating, then leave it behind when he departed from the plane. It would strengthen his identity as Pierre, especially with Pierre's voice prerecorded on the machine. We thought we cut it before the sound of his office clock chiming. It was a shock to me when I heard the clock later on the tape, but of course I couldn't admit what it was. At the office I tried to get the Interpol girl out before she heard and recognized the sound."

"Brider left the plane at Istanbul and flew back to Paris?"

She nodded. "He told me we would go to the country and live on the money from Louis' trust fund. That's why he was at the apartment with me tonight, getting samples of Louis' signature to forge for the check endorsements."

She had more to say, but after a time Sebastian and Laura left. Walking toward their car, Laura said, "He certainly sabotaged the China mission. The press will dig out every detail of it now. But tell me, Sebastian, how did you know it all?"

"When I realized Clare kept quiet about the clock chimes after she heard them on the tape, I knew she was somehow involved. An innocent person would have told Duvivier what the sound was, but she couldn't admit the recording was made earlier at the office. As for the Croire-Brider switch, the tape recording hinted that Brider wasn't Brider. And I was suspicious of Croire's identity when he readily admitted his name to you after that hallway tussle. They must have known we'd have a passenger list showing Croire in the seat

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opposite Brider. There was a risk admitting to the Croire identity, and I asked myself why he took it. The answer—because he *wasn't* Croire!

"If Brider and Croire *both* had suspicious identities, it seemed likely that they'd swapped places. When I saw the man in the apartment tonight I knew I was right. He looked too much like that blurred newspaper photo of Brider."

Laura slipped into the car's front seat. "I'm disappointed, you know. There was no musical bullet!"

Sebastian Blue grinned. "I'll try to find one for your birthday."

CRIMINALIMERICK

INTERPOL

by D. R. BENSEN

When criminal intrigues alarm,
Threatening dire global harm,
Interpol's Blue
Is counted on to
Clear it up with the aid of his Charme.

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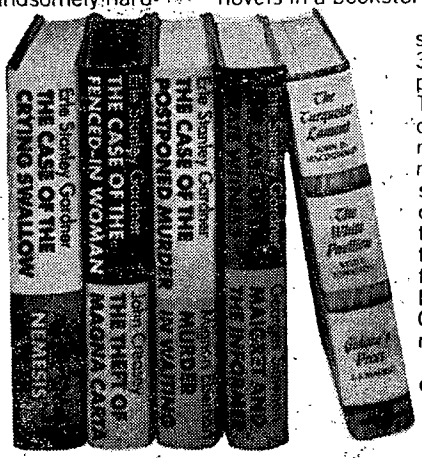
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